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THE WORKS OF
J. M. BARRIE

PETER PAN EDITION

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THE WORKS OF
J. M. BARRIE
PETER PAN EDITION

VOLUME X

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MAUDE ADAMS AS PETER PAN
FROM THE PAINTING BY CARLOTA SAINT GAUDENS

PETER PAN
AND OTHER PLAYS

BY

J. M. BARRIE

WITHDRAWN

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NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
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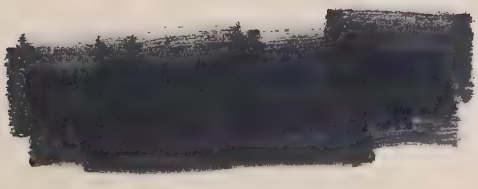

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PETER PAN

OR

THE BOY WHO WOULD NOT GROW UP

TO THE FIVE

A DEDICATION

Some disquieting confessions must be made in printing at last the play of *Peter Pan*; among them this, that I have no recollection of having written it. Of that, however, anon. What I want to do first is to give Peter to the Five without whom he never would have existed. I hope, my dear sirs, that in memory of what we have been to each other you will accept this dedication with your friend's love. The play of Peter is streaky with you still, though none may see this save ourselves. A score of Acts had to be left out, and you were in them all. We first brought Peter down, didn't we, with a blunt-headed arrow in Kensington Gardens? I seem to remember that we believed we had killed him, though he was only winded, and that after a spasm of exultation in our prowess the more soft-hearted among us wept and all of us thought of the police. There was not one of you who would not have sworn as an eye-witness to this occurrence; no doubt I was abetting, but you used to provide corroboration that was never given to you by me. As for myself, I suppose I always knew

that I made Peter by rubbing the five of you violently together, as savages with two sticks produce a flame. That is all he is, the spark I got from you.

We had good sport of him before we clipped him small to make him fit the boards. Some of you were not born when the story began and yet were hefty figures before we saw that the game was up. Do you remember a garden at Burpham and the initiation there of No. 4 when he was six weeks old, and three of you grudged letting him in so young? Have you, No. 3, forgotten the white violets at the Cistercian abbey in which we cassocked our first fairies (all little friends of St. Benedict), or your cry to the Gods, 'Do I just kill one pirate all the time?' Do you remember Marooners' Hut in the haunted groves of Waverley, and the St. Bernard dog in a tiger's mask who so frequently attacked you, and the literary record of that summer, *The Boy Castaways,* which is so much the best and the rarest of this author's works? What was it that made us eventually give to the public in the thin form of a play that which had been woven for ourselves alone? Alas, I know what it was, I was losing my grip. One by one as you swung monkey-wise from branch to branch in the wood of make-believe you reached the tree of knowledge. Sometimes you swung back into the wood, as the unthinking may at a cross-road take a familiar path that no longer leads to home; or you perched osten-

tatiously on its boughs to please me, pretending that you still belonged; soon you knew it only as the vanished wood, for it vanishes if one needs to look for it. A time came when I saw that No. 1, the most gallant of you all, ceased to believe that he was ploughing woods incarnadine, and with an apologetic eye for me derided the lingering faith of No. 2; when even No. 3 questioned gloomily whether he did not really spend his nights in bed. There were still two who knew no better, but their day was dawning. In these circumstances, I suppose, was begun the writing of the play of Peter. That was a quarter of a century ago, and I clutch my brows in vain to remember whether it was a last desperate throw to retain the five of you for a little longer, or merely a cold decision to turn you into bread and butter.

This brings us back to my uncomfortable admission that I have no recollection of writing the play of *Peter Pan,* now being published for the first time so long after he made his bow upon the stage. You had played it until you tired of it, and tossed it in the air and gored it and left it derelict in the mud and went on your way singing other songs; and then I stole back and sewed some of the gory fragments together with a pen-nib. That is what must have happened, but I cannot remember doing it. I remember writing the story of *Peter and Wendy* many years after the production of the play, but I might

have cribbed that from some typed copy. I can haul back to mind the writing of almost every other assay of mine, however forgotten by the pretty public; but this play of Peter, no. Even my beginning as an amateur playwright, that noble mouthful, *Bandelero the Bandit,* I remember every detail of its composition in my school days at Dumfries. Not less vivid is my first little piece, produced by Mr. Toole. It was called *Ibsen's Ghost,* and was a parody of the mightiest craftsman that ever wrote for our kind friends in front. To save the management the cost of typing I wrote out the 'parts,' after being told what parts were, and I can still recall my first words, spoken so plaintively by a now famous actress,—'To run away from my second husband just as I ran away from my first, it feels quite like old times.' On the first night a man in the pit found *Ibsen's Ghost* so diverting that he had to be removed in hysterics. After that no one seems to have thought of it at all. But what a man to carry about with one! How odd, too, that these trifles should adhere to the mind that cannot remember the long job of writing Peter. It does seem almost suspicious, especially as I have not the original MS. of *Peter Pan* (except a few stray pages) with which to support my claim. I have indeed another MS., lately made, but that 'proves nothing.' I know not whether I lost that original MS. or destroyed it or happily gave it away. I talk of

dedicating the play to you, but how can I prove it is mine? How ought I to act if some other hand, who could also have made a copy, thinks it worth while to contest the cold rights? Cold they are to me now as that laughter of yours in which Peter came into being long before he was caught and written down. There is Peter still, but to me he lies sunk in the gay Black Lake.

Any one of you five brothers has a better claim to the authorship than most, and I would not fight you for it, but you should have launched your case long ago in the days when you most admired me, which were in the first year of the play, owing to a rumour's reaching you that my spoils were one-and-sixpence a night. This was untrue, but it did give me a standing among you. You watched for my next play with peeled eyes, not for entertainment but lest it contained some chance witticism of yours that could be challenged as collaboration; indeed I believe there still exists a legal document, full of the Aforesaid and Henceforward to be called Part-Author, in which for some such snatching I was tied down to pay No. 2 one halfpenny daily throughout the run of the piece.

During the rehearsals of Peter (and it is evidence in my favour that I was admitted to them) a depressed man in overalls, carrying a mug of tea or a paint-pot, used often to appear by my side in the shadowy stalls and say to me, 'The gallery boys won't

stand it.' He then mysteriously faded away as if he were the theatre ghost. This hopelessness of his is what all dramatists are said to feel at such times, so perhaps he was the author. Again, a large number of children whom I have seen playing Peter in their homes with careless mastership, constantly putting in better words, could have thrown it off with ease. It was for such as they that after the first production I had to add something to the play at the request of parents (who thus showed that they thought me the responsible person) about no one being able to fly until the fairy dust had been blown on him; so many children having gone home and tried it from their beds and needed surgical attention.

Notwithstanding other possibilities, I think I wrote Peter, and if so it must have been in the usual inky way. Some of it, I like to think, was done in that native place which is the dearest spot on earth to me, though my last heart-beats shall be with my beloved solitary London that was so hard to reach. I must have sat at a table with that great dog waiting for me to stop, not complaining, for he knew it was thus we made our living, but giving me a look when he found he was to be in the play, with his sex changed. In after years when the actor who was Nana had to go to the wars he first taught his wife how to take his place as the dog till he came back, and I am glad that I see nothing funny in this; it

seems to me to belong to the play. I offer this obtuseness on my part as my first proof that I am the author.

Some say that we are different people at different periods of our lives, changing not through effort of will, which is a brave affair, but in the easy course of nature every ten years or so. I suppose this theory might explain my present trouble, but I don't hold with it; I think one remains the same person throughout, merely passing, as it were, in these lapses of time from one room to another, but all in the same house. If we unlock the rooms of the far past we can peer in and see ourselves, busily occupied in beginning to become you and me. Thus, if I am the author in question the way he is to go should already be showing in the occupant of my first compartment, at whom I now take the liberty to peep. Here he is at the age of seven or so with his fellow-conspirator Robb, both in glengarry bonnets. They are giving an entertainment in a tiny old washing-house that still stands. The charge for admission is preens, a bool, or a peerie (I taught you a good deal of Scotch, so possibly you can follow that), and apparently the culminating Act consists in our trying to put each other into the boiler, though some say that I also addressed the spell-bound audience. This washing-house is not only the theatre of my first play, but has a still closer connection with Peter. It is the original of the little house the Lost Boys built in the

Never Land for Wendy, the chief difference being that it never wore John's tall hat as a chimney. If Robb had owned a lum hat I have no doubt that it would have been placed on the washing-house.

Here is that boy again some four years older, and the reading he is munching feverishly is about desert islands; he calls them wrecked islands. He buys his sanguinary tales surreptitiously in penny numbers. I see a change coming over him; he is blanching as he reads in the high-class magazine, *Chatterbox,* a fulmination against such literature, and sees that unless his greed for islands is quenched he is for ever lost. With gloaming he steals out of the house, his library bulging beneath his palpitating waistcoat. I follow like his shadow, as indeed I am, and watch him dig a hole in a field at Pathhead farm and bury his islands in it; it was ages ago, but I could walk straight to that hole in the field now and delve for the remains. I peep into the next compartment. There he is again, ten years older, an undergraduate now and craving to be a real explorer, one of those who do things instead of prating of them, but otherwise unaltered; he might be painted at twenty on top of a mast, in his hand a spy-glass through which he rakes the horizon for an elusive strand. I go from room to room, and he is now a man, real exploration abandoned (though only because no one would have him). Soon he is even concocting other plays, and

quaking a little lest some low person counts how many islands there are in them. I note that with the years the islands grow more sinister, but it is only because he has now to write with the left hand, the right having given out; evidently one thinks more darkly down the left arm. Go to the keyhole of the compartment where he and I join up, and you may see us wondering whether they would stand one more island. This journey through the house may not convince any one that I wrote Peter, but it does suggest me as a likely person. I pause to ask myself whether I read *Chatterbox* again, suffered the old agony, and buried that MS. of the play in a hole in a field.

Of course this is over-charged. Perhaps we do change; except a little something in us which is no larger than a mote in the eye, and that, like it, dances in front of us beguiling us all our days. I cannot cut the hair by which it hangs.

The strongest evidence that I am the author is to be found, I think, in a now melancholy volume, the aforementioned *The Boy Castaways*; so you must excuse me for parading that work here. Officer of the Court, call *The Boy Castaways*. The witness steps forward and proves to be a book you remember well though you have not glanced at it these many years. I pulled it out of a bookcase just now not without difficulty, for its recent occupation has been

to support the shelf above. I suppose, though I am uncertain, that it was I and not you who hammered it into that place of utility. It is a little battered and bent after the manner of those who shoulder burdens, and ought (to our shame) to remind us of the witnesses who sometimes get an hour off from the cells to give evidence before his Lordship. I have said that it is the rarest of my printed works, as it must be, for the only edition was limited to two copies, of which one (there was always some devilry in any matter connected with Peter) instantly lost itself in a railway carriage. This is the survivor. The idlers in court may have assumed that it is a handwritten screed, and are impressed by its bulk. It is printed by Constable's (how handsomely you did us, dear Blaikie), it contains thirty-five illustrations and is bound in cloth with a picture stamped on the cover of the three eldest of you 'setting out to be wrecked.' This record is supposed to be edited by the youngest of the three, and I must have granted him that honour to make up for his being so often lifted bodily out of our adventures by his nurse, who kept breaking into them for the fell purpose of giving him a midday rest. No. 4 rested so much at this period that he was merely an honorary member of the band, waving his foot to you for luck when you set off with bow and arrow to shoot his dinner for him; and one may rummage the book in vain for any trace of No. 5. Here is the

title-page, except that you are numbered instead of named—

THE BOY
CASTAWAYS
OF BLACK LAKE ISLAND

Being a record of the Terrible
Adventures of Three Brothers
in the summer of 1901
faithfully set forth
by No. 3.

LONDON
Published by J. M. Barrie
in the Gloucester Road
1901

There is a long preface by No. 3 in which we gather your ages at this first flight. 'No. 1 was eight and a month, No. 2 was approaching his seventh lustrum, and I was a good bit past four.' Of his two elders, while commending their fearless dispositions, the editor complains that they wanted to do all the shooting and carried the whole equipment of arrows inside their shirts. He is attractively modest about himself, 'Of No. 3 I prefer to say nothing, hoping that the tale as it is unwound will show that he was a boy of deeds rather than of words,' a quality which he hints did not unduly protrude upon the brows of Nos. 1 and 2. His preface ends on a high note, 'I should say that the work was in the first instance

compiled as a record simply at which we could whet our memories, and that it is now published for No. 4's benefit. If it teaches him by example lessons in fortitude and manly endurance we shall consider that we were not wrecked in vain.'

Published to whet your memories. Does it whet them? Do you hear once more, like some long-forgotten whistle beneath your window (Robb at dawn calling me to the fishing!) the not quite mortal blows that still echo in some of the chapter headings? —'Chapter II, No. 1 teaches Wilkinson (his master) a Stern Lesson—We Run away to Sea. Chapter III, A Fearful Hurricane—Wreck of the "Anna Pink" —We go crazy from Want of Food—Proposal to eat No. 3—Land Ahoy.' Such are two chapters out of sixteen. Are these again your javelins cutting tunes in the blue haze of the pines; do you sweat as you scale the dreadful Valley of Rolling Stones, and cleanse your hands of pirate blood by scouring them carelessly in Mother Earth? Can you still make a fire (you could do it once, Mr. Seton-Thompson taught us in, surely an odd place, the Reform Club) by rubbing those sticks together? Was it the travail of hut-building that subsequently advised Peter to find a 'home under the ground'? The bottle and mugs in that lurid picture, 'Last night on the Island,' seem to suggest that you had changed from Lost Boys into pirates, which was probably also a ten-

dency of Peter's. Listen again to our stolen saw-mill, man's proudest invention; when he made the saw-mill he beat the birds for music in a wood.

The illustrations (full-paged) in *The Boy Castaways* are all photographs taken by myself; some of them indeed of phenomena that had to be invented afterwards, for you were always off doing the wrong things when I pressed the button. I see that we combined instruction with amusement; perhaps we had given our kingly word to that effect. How otherwise account for such wording to the pictures as these: 'It is undoubtedly,' says No. 1 in a fir tree that is bearing unwonted fruit, recently tied to it, 'the *Cocos nucifera,* for observe the slender columns supporting the crown of leaves which fall with a grace that no art can imitate.' 'Truly,' continues No. 1 under the same tree in another forest as he leans upon his trusty gun, 'though the perils of these happenings are great, yet would I rejoice to endure still greater privations to be thus rewarded by such wondrous studies of Nature.' He is soon back to the practical, however, 'recognising the Mango (*Magnifera indica*) by its lancet-shaped leaves and the cucumber-shaped fruit.' No. 1 was certainly the right sort of voyager to be wrecked with, though if my memory fails me not, No. 2, to whom these strutting observations were addressed, sometimes protested because none of them was given to him. No. 3 being the

author is in surprisingly few of the pictures, but this, you may remember, was because the lady already darkly referred to used to pluck him from our midst for his siesta at 12 o'clock, which was the hour that best suited the camera. With a skill on which he has never been complimented the photographer sometimes got No. 3 nominally included in a wild-life picture when he was really in a humdrum house kicking on the sofa. Thus in a scene representing Nos. 1 and 2 sitting scowling outside the hut it is untruly written that they scowled because 'their brother was within singing and playing on a barbaric instrument. The music,' the unseen No. 3 is represented as saying (obviously forestalling No. 1), 'is rude and to a cultured ear discordant, but the songs like those of the Arabs are full of poetic imagery.' He was perhaps allowed to say this sulkily on the sofa.

Though *The Boy Castaways* has sixteen chapter-headings, there is no other letterpress; an absence which possible purchasers might complain of, though there are surely worse ways of writing a book than this. These headings anticipate much of the play of *Peter Pan,* but there were many incidents of our Kensington Gardens days that never got into the book, such as our Antarctic exploits when we reached the Pole in advance of our friend Captain Scott and cut our initials on it for him to find, a strange fore-

shadowing of what was really to happen. In *The Boy Castaways* Captain Hook has arrived but is called Captain Swarthy, and he seems from the pictures to have been a black man. This character, as you do not need to be told, is held by those in the know to be autobiographical. You had many tussles with him (though you never, I think, got his right arm) before you reached the terrible chapter (which might be taken from the play) entitled 'We Board the Pirate Ship at Dawn—A Rakish Craft—No. 1 Hew-them-Down and No. 2 of the Red Hatchet—A Holocaust of Pirates—Rescue of Peter.' (Hullo, Peter rescued instead of rescuing others? I know what that means and so do you, but we are not going to give away all our secrets.) The scene of the Holocaust is the Black Lake (afterwards, when we let women in, the Mermaids' Lagoon). The pirate captain's end was not in the mouth of a crocodile though we had crocodiles on the spot ('while No. 2 was removing the crocodiles from the stream No. 1 shot a few parrots, *Psittacidæ,* for our evening meal'). I think our captain had divers deaths owing to unseemly competition among you, each wanting to slay him single-handed. On a special occasion, such as when No. 3 pulled out the tooth himself, you gave the deed to him, but took it from him while he rested. The only pictorial representation in the book of Swarthy's fate is in two parts. In one, called briefly

'We string him up,' Nos. 1 and 2, stern as Athos, are hauling him up a tree by a rope, his face snarling as if it were a grinning mask (which indeed it was), and his garments very like some of my own stuffed with bracken. The other, the same scene next day, is called 'The Vultures had Picked him Clean,' and tells its own tale.

The dog in *The Boy Castaways* seems never to have been called Nana but was evidently in training for that post. He originally belonged to Swarthy (or to Captain Marryat?), and the first picture of him, lean, skulking, and hunched (how did I get that effect?), 'patrolling the island' in that monster's interests, gives little indication of the domestic paragon he was to become. We lured him away to the better life, and there is, later, a touching picture, a clear forecast of the Darling nursery, entitled 'We trained the dog to watch over us while we slept.' In this he also is sleeping, in a position that is a careful copy of his charges; indeed any trouble we had with him was because, once he knew he was in a story, he thought his safest course was to imitate you in everything you did. How anxious he was to show that he understood the game, and more generous than you, he never pretended that he was the one who killed Captain Swarthy. I must not imply that he was entirely without initiative, for it was his own idea to bark warningly a minute or two before twelve

o'clock as a signal to No. 3 that his keeper was probably on her way for him (Disappearance of No. 3); and he became so used to living in the world of Pretend that when we reached the hut of a morning he was often there waiting for us, looking, it is true, rather idiotic, but with a new bark he had invented which puzzled us until we decided that he was demanding the password. He was always willing to do any extra jobs, such as becoming the tiger in mask, and when after a fierce engagement you carried home that mask in triumph, he joined in the procession proudly and never let on that the trophy had ever been part of him. Long afterwards he saw the play from a box in the theatre, and as familiar scenes were unrolled before his eyes I have never seen a dog so bothered. At one matinee we even let him for a moment take the place of the actor who played Nana, and I don't know that any members of the audience ever noticed the change, though he introduced some 'business' that was new to them but old to you and me. Heigh-ho, I suspect that in this reminiscence I am mixing him up with his successor, for such a one there had to be, the loyal Newfoundland who, perhaps in the following year, applied, so to say, for the part by bringing hedgehogs to the hut in his mouth as offerings for our evening repasts. The head and coat of him were copied for the Nana of the play.

They do seem to be emerging out of our island, don't they, the little people of the play, all except that sly one, the chief figure, who draws farther and farther into the wood as we advance upon him? He so dislikes being tracked, as if there were something odd about him, that when he dies he means to get up and blow away the particle that will be his ashes.

Wendy has not yet appeared, but she has been trying to come ever since that loyal nurse cast the humorous shadow of woman upon the scene and made us feel that it might be fun to let in a disturbing element. Perhaps she would have bored her way in at last whether we wanted her or not. It may be that even Peter did not really bring her to the Never Land of his free will, but merely pretended to do so because she would not stay away. Even Tinker Bell had reached our island before we left it. It was one evening when we climbed the wood carrying No. 4 to show him what the trail was like by twilight. As our lanterns twinkled among the leaves No. 4 saw a twinkle stand still for a moment and he waved his foot gaily to it, thus creating Tink. It must not be thought, however, that there were any other sentimental passages between No. 4 and Tink; indeed, as he got to know her better he suspected her of frequenting the hut to see what we had been having for supper, and to partake of the same, and he pursued her with malignancy.

A safe but sometimes chilly way of recalling the past is to force open a crammed drawer. If you are searching for anything in particular you don't find it, but something falls out at the back that is often more interesting. It is in this way that I get my desultory reading, which includes the few stray leaves of the original MS. of Peter that I have said I do possess, though even they, when returned to the drawer, are gone again, as if that touch of devilry lurked in them still. They show that in early days I hacked at and added to the play. In the drawer I find some scraps of Mr. Crook's delightful music, and other incomplete matter relating to Peter. Here is the reply of a boy whom I favoured with a seat in my box and injudiciously asked at the end what he had liked best. 'What I think I liked best,' he said, 'was tearing up the programme and dropping the bits on people's heads.' Thus am I often laid low. A copy of my favourite programme of the play is still in the drawer. In the first or second year of Peter No. 4 could not attend through illness, so we took the play to his nursery, far away in the country, an array of vehicles almost as glorious as a travelling circus; the leading parts were played by the youngest children in the London company, and No. 4, aged five, looked on solemnly at the performance from his bed and never smiled once. That was my first and only appearance on the real stage, and this copy

of the programme shows I was thought so meanly of as an actor that they printed my name in smaller letters than the others.

I have said little here of Nos. 4 and 5, and it is high time I had finished. They had a long summer day, and I turn round twice and now they are off to school. On Monday, as it seems, I was escorting No. 5 to a children's party and brushing his hair in the ante-room; and by Thursday he is placing me against the wall of an underground station and saying, 'Now I am going to get the tickets; don't move till I come back for you or you'll lose yourself.' No. 4 jumps from being astride my shoulders fishing, I knee-deep in the stream, to becoming, while still a schoolboy, the sternest of my literary critics. Anything he shook his head over I abandoned, and conceivably the world has thus been deprived of masterpieces. There was for instance an unfortunate little tragedy which I liked until I foolishly told No. 4 its subject, when he frowned and said he had better have a look at it. He read it, and then, patting me on the back, as only he and No. 1 could touch me, said, 'You know you can't do this sort of thing.' End of a tragedian. Sometimes, however, No. 4 liked my efforts, and I walked in the azure that day when he returned *Dear Brutus* to me with the comment 'Not so bad.' In earlier days, when he was ten, I offered him the MS. of my book *Margaret Ogilvy*.

'Oh, thanks,' he said almost immediately, and added, 'Of course my desk is awfully full.' I reminded him that he could take out some of its more ridiculous contents. He said, 'I have read it already in the book.' This I had not known, and I was secretly elated, but I said that people sometimes liked to preserve this kind of thing as a curiosity. He said 'Oh' again. I said tartly that he was not compelled to take it if he didn't want it. He said, 'Of course, I want it, but my desk—' Then he wriggled out of the room and came back in a few minutes dragging in No. 5 and announcing triumphantly, 'No. 5 will have it.'

The rebuffs I have got from all of you! They were especially crushing in those early days when one by one you came out of your belief in fairies and lowered on me as the deceiver. My grandest triumph, the best thing in the play of *Peter Pan* (though it is not in it), is that long after No. 4 had ceased to believe, I brought him back to the faith for at least two minutes. We were on our way in a boat to fish the Outer Hebrides (where we caught *Mary Rose*), and though it was a journey of days he wore his fishing basket on his back all the time, so as to be able to begin at once. His one pain was the absence of Johnny Mackay, for Johnny was the loved gillie of the previous summer who had taught him everything that is worth knowing (which is a matter of

flies) but could not be with us this time as he would have had to cross and re-cross Scotland to reach us. As the boat drew near the Kyle of Lochalsh pier I told Nos. 4 and 5 it was such a famous wishing pier that they had now but to wish and they should have. No. 5 believed at once and expressed a wish to meet himself (I afterwards found him on the pier searching faces confidently), but No. 4 thought it more of my untimely nonsense and doggedly declined to humour me. 'Whom do you want to see most, No. 4?' 'Of course I would like most to see Johnny Mackay.' 'Well, then, wish for him.' 'Oh, rot.' 'It can't do any harm to wish.' Contemptuously he wished, and as the ropes were thrown on the pier he saw Johnny waiting for him, loaded with angling paraphernalia. I know no one less like a fairy than Johnny Mackay, but for two minutes No. 4 was quivering in another world than ours. When he came to he gave me a smile which meant that we understood each other, and thereafter neglected me for a month, being always with Johnny. As I have said, this episode is not in the play; so though I dedicate *Peter Pan* to you I keep the smile, with the few other broken fragments of immortality that have come my way.

ACT I

THE NURSERY

The night nursery of the Darling family, which is the scene of our opening Act, is at the top of a rather depressed street in Bloomsbury. We have a right to place it where we will, and the reason Bloomsbury is chosen is that Mr. Roget once lived there. So did we in days when his *Thesaurus* was our only companion in London; and we whom he has helped to wend our way through life have always wanted to pay him a little compliment. The Darlings therefore lived in Bloomsbury.

It is a corner house whose top window, the important one, looks upon a leafy square from which Peter used to fly up to it, to the delight of three children and no doubt the irritation of passers-by. The street is still there, though the steaming sausage shop has gone; and apparently the same cards perch now as then over the doors, inviting homeless ones to come and stay with the hospitable inhabitants. Since the days of the Darlings, however, a lick of paint has been applied; and our corner house in particular, which has swallowed its neighbour, blooms with awful freshness as if the colours had been discharged

upon it through a hose. Its card now says 'No children,' meaning maybe that the goings-on of Wendy and her brothers have given the house a bad name. As for ourselves, we have not been in it since we went back to reclaim our old *Thesaurus*.

That is what we call the Darling house, but you may dump it down anywhere you like, and if you think it was your house you are very probably right. It wanders about London looking for anybody in need of it, like the little house in the Never Land.

The blind (which is what Peter would have called the theatre curtain if he had ever seen one) rises on that top room, a shabby little room if Mrs. Darling had not made it the hub of creation by her certainty that such it was, and adorned it to match with a loving heart and all the scrapings of her purse. The door on the right leads into the day nursery, which she has no right to have, but she made it herself with nails in her mouth and a paste-pot in her hand. This is the door the children will come in by. There are three beds and (rather oddly) a large dog-kennel; two of these beds, with the kennel, being on the left and the other on the right. The coverlets of the beds (if visitors are expected) are made out of Mrs. Darling's wedding-gown, which was such a grand affair that it still keeps them pinched. Over each bed is a china house, the size of a linnet's nest, containing a night-light. The fire, which is on our right, is burn-

ing as discreetly as if it were in custody, which in a sense it is, for supporting the mantelshelf are two wooden soldiers, home-made, begun by Mr. Darling, finished by Mrs. Darling, repainted (unfortunately) by John Darling. On the fire-guard hang incomplete parts of children's night attire. The door the parents will come in by is on the left. At the back is the bathroom door, with a cuckoo clock over it; and in the centre is the window, which is at present ever so staid and respectable, but half an hour hence (namely at 6.30 p.m.) will be able to tell a very strange tale to the police.

The only occupant of the room at present is Nana the nurse, reclining, not as you might expect on the one soft chair, but on the floor. She is a Newfoundland dog, and though this may shock the grandiose, the not exactly affluent will make allowances. The Darlings could not afford to have a nurse, they could not afford indeed to have children; and now you are beginning to understand how they did it. Of course Nana has been trained by Mrs. Darling, but like all treasures she was born to it. In this play we shall see her chiefly inside the house, but she was just as exemplary outside, escorting the two elders to school with an umbrella in her mouth, for instance, and butting them back into line if they strayed.

The cuckoo clock strikes six, and Nana springs into life. This first moment in the play is tremen-

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dously important, for if the actor playing Nana does not spring properly we are undone. She will probably be played by a boy, if one clever enough can be found, and must never be on two legs except on those rare occasions when an ordinary nurse would be on four. This Nana must go about all her duties in a most ordinary manner, so that you know in your bones that she performs them just so every evening at six; naturalness must be her passion; indeed, it should be the aim of every one in the play, for which she is now setting the pace. All the characters, whether grown-ups or babes, must wear a child's outlook on life as their only important adornment. If they cannot help being funny they are begged to go away. A good motto for all would be 'The little less, and how much it is.'

Nana, making such use of her mouth, 'turns down' the beds, and carries the various articles on the fire-guard across to them. Then pushing the bathroom door open, she is seen at work on the taps preparing Michael's bath; after which she enters from the day nursery with the youngest of the family on her back.

MICHAEL (*obstreperous*). I won't go to bed, I won't, I won't. Nana, it isn't six o'clock yet. Two minutes more, please, one minute more? Nana, I won't be bathed, I tell you I will not be bathed.

(*Here the bathroom door closes on them, and* MRS. DARLING, *who has perhaps heard his cry, enters the nursery. She is the loveliest lady in Bloomsbury, with a sweet mocking mouth, and as she is going out to dinner to-night she is already wearing her evening gown because she knows her children like to see her in it. It is a delicious confection made by herself out of nothing and other people's mistakes. She does not often go out to dinner, preferring when the children are in bed to sit beside them tidying up their minds, just as if they were drawers. If* WENDY *and the boys could keep awake they might see her repacking into their proper places the many articles of the mind that have strayed during the day, lingering humorously over some of their contents, wondering where on earth they picked this thing up, making discoveries sweet and not so sweet, pressing this to her cheek and hurriedly stowing that out of sight. When they wake in the morning the naughtinesses with which they went to bed are not, alas, blown away, but they are placed at the bottom of the drawer; and on the top, beautifully aired, are their prettier thoughts ready for the new day.*

As she enters the room she is startled to see a strange little face outside the window and a hand groping as if it wanted to come in.)

MRS. DARLING. Who are you? (*The unknown disappears; she hurries to the window.*) No one there. And yet I feel sure I saw a face. My children! (*She throws open the bathroom door and* MICHAEL'S *head appears gaily over the bath. He splashes; she throws kisses to him and closes the door. 'Wendy, John,' she cries, and gets reassuring answers from the day nursery. She sits down, relieved, on* WENDY'S *bed; and* WENDY *and* JOHN *come in, looking their smallest size, as children tend to do to a mother suddenly in fear for them.*)

JOHN (*histrionically*). We are doing an act; we are playing at being you and father. (*He imitates the only father who has come under his special notice.*) A little less noise there.

WENDY. Now let us pretend we have a baby.

JOHN (*good-naturedly*). I am happy to inform you, Mrs. Darling, that you are now a mother. (WENDY *gives way to ecstasy.*) You have missed the chief thing; you haven't asked, 'boy or girl?'

WENDY. I am so glad to have one at all, I don't care which it is.

JOHN (*crushingly*). That is just the difference between gentlemen and ladies. Now you tell me.

WENDY. I am happy to acquaint you, Mr. Darling, you are now a father.

JOHN. Boy or girl?

WENDY (*presenting herself*). Girl.

JOHN. Tuts.

WENDY. You horrid.

JOHN. Go on.

WENDY. I am happy to acquaint you, Mr. Darling, you are again a father.

JOHN. Boy or girl?

WENDY. Boy. (JOHN *beams.*) Mummy, it's hateful of him.

(MICHAEL *emerges from the bathroom in* JOHN'S *old pyjamas and giving his face a last wipe with the towel.*)

MICHAEL (*expanding*). Now, John, have me.

JOHN. We don't want any more.

MICHAEL (*contracting*). Am I not to be born at all?

JOHN. Two is enough.

MICHAEL (*wheedling*). Come, John; boy, John. (*Appalled*) Nobody wants me!

MRS. DARLING. I do.

MICHAEL (*with a glimmer of hope*). Boy or girl?

MRS. DARLING (*with one of those happy thoughts of hers*). Boy.

(*Triumph of* MICHAEL; *discomfiture of* JOHN. MR. DARLING *arrives, in no mood unfortunately to gloat over this domestic scene. He is really a good man as breadwinners go, and it is hard luck for him to be propelled into the room now, when if we had brought him in a few minutes*

earlier or later he might have made a fairer impression. In the city where he sits on a stool all day, as fixed as a postage stamp, he is so like all the others on stools that you recognize him not by his face but by his stool, but at home the way to gratify him is to say that he has a distinct personality. He is very conscientious, and in the days when MRS. DARLING *gave up keeping the house books correctly and drew pictures instead (which he called her guesses), he did all the totting up for her, holding her hand while he calculated whether they could have* WENDY *or not, and coming down on the right side. It is with regret, therefore, that we introduce him as a tornado, rushing into the nursery in evening dress, but without his coat, and brandishing in his hand a recalcitrant white tie.*)

MR. DARLING (*implying that he has searched for her everywhere and that the nursery is a strange place in which to find her*). Oh, here you are, Mary.

MRS. DARLING (*knowing at once what is the matter*). What is the matter, George dear?

MR. DARLING (*as if the word were monstrous*). Matter! This tie, it will not tie. (*He waxes sarcastic.*) Not round my neck. Round the bed-post, oh yes; twenty times have I made it up round the bed-post, but round my neck, oh dear no; begs to be excused.

MICHAEL (*in a joyous transport*). Say it again, father, say it again!

MR. DARLING (*witheringly*). Thank you. (*Goaded by a suspiciously crooked smile on* MRS. DARLING'S *face*) I warn you, Mary, that unless this tie is round my neck we don't go out to dinner to-night, and if I don't go out to dinner to-night I never go to the office again, and if I don't go to the office again you and I starve, and our children will be thrown into the streets.

(*The children blanch as they grasp the gravity of the situation.*)

MRS. DARLING. Let me try, dear.

(*In a terrible silence their progeny cluster round them. Will she succeed? Their fate depends on it. She fails—no, she succeeds. In another moment they are wildly gay, romping round the room on each other's shoulders. Father is even a better horse than mother.* MICHAEL *is dropped upon his bed,* WENDY *retires to prepare for hers,* JOHN *runs from* NANA, *who has reappeared with the bath towel.*)

JOHN (*rebellious*). I won't be bathed. You needn't think it.

MR. DARLING (*in the grand manner*). Go and be bathed at once, sir.

(*With bent head* JOHN *follows* NANA *into the bathroom.* MR. DARLING *swells.*)

MICHAEL (*as he is put between the sheets*). Mother, how did you get to know me?

MR. DARLING. A little less noise there.

MICHAEL (*growing solemn*). At what time was I born, mother?

MRS. DARLING. At two o'clock in the night-time, dearest.

MICHAEL. Oh, mother, I hope I didn't wake you.

MRS. DARLING. They are rather sweet, don't you think, George?

MR. DARLING (*doting*). There is not their equal on earth, and they are ours, ours!

(*Unfortunately* NANA *has come from the bathroom for a sponge and she collides with his trousers, the first pair he has ever had with braid on them.*)

MR. DARLING. Mary, it is too bad; just look at this; covered with hairs. Clumsy, clumsy!

(NANA *goes, a drooping figure.*)

MRS. DARLING. Let me brush you, dear.

(*Once more she is successful. They are now by the fire, and* MICHAEL *is in bed doing idiotic things with a teddy bear.*)

MR. DARLING (*depressed*). I sometimes think, Mary, that it is a mistake to have a dog for a nurse.

MRS. DARLING. George, Nana is a treasure.

MR. DARLING. No doubt; but I have an uneasy feeling at times that she looks upon the children as puppies.

MRS. DARLING (*rather faintly*). Oh no, dear one, I am sure she knows they have souls.

MR. DARLING (*profoundly*). I wonder, I wonder.

(*The opportunity has come for her to tell him of something that is on her mind.*)

MRS. DARLING. George, we must keep Nana, I will tell you why. (*Her seriousness impresses him.*) My dear, when I came into this room to-night I saw a face at the window.

MR. DARLING (*incredulous*). A face at the window, three floors up? Pooh!

MRS. DARLING. It was the face of a little boy; he was trying to get in. George, this is not the first time I have seen that boy.

MR. DARLING (*beginning to think that this may be a man's job*). Oho!

MRS. DARLING (*making sure that* MICHAEL *does not hear*). The first time was a week ago. It was Nana's night out, and I had been drowsing here by the fire when suddenly I felt a draught, as if the window were open. I looked round and I saw that boy—in the room.

MR. DARLING. In the room?

MRS. DARLING. I screamed. Just then Nana came back and she at once sprang at him. The boy leapt for the window. She pulled down the sash quickly, but was too late to catch him.

MR. DARLING (*who knows he would not have been too late*). I thought so!

MRS. DARLING. Wait. The boy escaped, but his shadow had not time to get out; down came the window and cut it clean off.

MR. DARLING (*heavily*). Mary, Mary, why didn't you keep that shadow?

MRS. DARLING (*scoring*). I did. I rolled it up, George; and here it is.

(*She produces it from a drawer. They unroll and examine the flimsy thing, which is not more material than a puff of smoke, and if let go would probably float into the ceiling without discolouring it. Yet it has human shape. As they nod their heads over it they present the most satisfying picture on earth, two happy parents conspiring cosily by the fire for the good of their children.*)

MR. DARLING. It is nobody I know, but he does look a scoundrel.

MRS. DARLING. I think he comes back to get his shadow, George.

MR. DARLING (*meaning that the miscreant has now a father to deal with*). I dare say. (*He sees himself telling the story to the other stools at the office.*) There is money in this, my love. I shall take it to the British Museum to-morrow and have it priced.

(*The shadow is rolled up and replaced in the drawer.*)

MRS. DARLING (*like a guilty person*). George, I have not told you all; I am afraid to.

MR. DARLING (*who knows exactly the right moment to treat a woman as a beloved child*). Cowardy, cowardy custard.

MRS. DARLING (*pouting*). No, I'm not.

MR. DARLING. Oh yes, you are.

MRS. DARLING. George, I'm not.

MR. DARLING. Then why not tell? (*Thus cleverly soothed she goes on.*)

MRS. DARLING. The boy was not alone that first time. He was accompanied by—I don't know how to describe it; by a ball of light, not as big as my fist, but it darted about the room like a living thing.

MR. DARLING (*though open-minded*). That is very unusual. It escaped with the boy?

MRS. DARLING. Yes. (*Sliding her hand into his.*) George, what can all this mean?

MR. DARLING (*ever ready*). What indeed!

(*This intimate scene is broken by the return of* NANA *with a bottle in her mouth.*)

MRS. DARLING (*at once dissembling*). What is that, Nana? Ah, of course; Michael, it is your medicine.

MICHAEL (*promptly*). Won't take it.

MR. DARLING (*recalling his youth*). Be a man, Michael.

MICHAEL. Won't.

MRS. DARLING (*weakly*). I'll get you a lovely chocky to take after it. (*She leaves the room, though her husband calls after her.*)

MR. DARLING. Mary, don't pamper him. When I was your age, Michael, I took medicine without a murmur. I said 'Thank you, kind parents, for giving me bottles to make me well.'

(WENDY, *who has appeared in her night-gown, hears this and believes.*)

WENDY. That medicine you sometimes take is much nastier, isn't it, father?

MR. DARLING (*valuing her support*). Ever so much nastier. And as an example to you, Michael, I would take it now (*thankfully*) if I hadn't lost the bottle.

WENDY (*always glad to be of service*). I know where it is, father. I'll fetch it.

(*She is gone before he can stop her. He turns for help to* JOHN, *who has come from the bathroom attired for bed.*)

MR. DARLING. John, it is the most beastly stuff. It is that sticky sweet kind.

JOHN (*who is perhaps still playing at parents*). Never mind, father, it will soon be over.

(*A spasm of ill-will to* JOHN *cuts through* MR. DARLING, *and is gone.* WENDY *returns panting.*)

WENDY. Here it is, father; I have been as quick as I could.

MR. DARLING (*with a sarcasm that is completely thrown away on her*). You have been wonderfully quick, precious quick!

(*He is now at the foot of* MICHAEL'S *bed,* NANA *is by its side, holding the medicine spoon insinuatingly in her mouth.*)

WENDY (*proudly, as she pours out* MR. DARLING'S *medicine*). Michael, now you will see how father takes it.

MR. DARLING (*hedging*). Michael first.

MICHAEL (*full of unworthy suspicions*). Father first.

MR. DARLING. It will make me sick, you know.

JOHN (*lightly*). Come on, father.

MR. DARLING. Hold your tongue, sir.

WENDY (*disturbed*). I thought you took it quite easily, father, saying 'Thank you, kind parents, for—'

MR. DARLING. That is not the point; the point is that there is more in my glass than in Michael's spoon. It isn't fair, I swear though it were with my last breath, it is not fair.

MICHAEL (*coldly*). Father, I'm waiting.

MR. DARLING. It's all very well to say you are waiting; so am I waiting.

MICHAEL. Father's a cowardy custard.

MR. DARLING. So are you a cowardy custard.

(*They are now glaring at each other.*)

MICHAEL. I am not frightened.

MR. DARLING. Neither am I frightened.

MICHAEL. Well, then, take it.

MR. DARLING. Well, then, you take it.

WENDY (*butting in again*). Why not take it at the same time?

MR. DARLING (*haughtily*). Certainly. Are you ready, Michael?

WENDY (*as nothing has happened*). One—two—three.

(MICHAEL *partakes, but* MR. DARLING *resorts to hanky-panky.*)

JOHN. Father hasn't taken his!

(MICHAEL *howls.*)

WENDY (*inexpressibly pained*). Oh father!

MR. DARLING (*who has been hiding the glass behind him*). What do you mean by 'oh father'? Stop that row, Michael. I meant to take mine but I—missed it. (NANA *shakes her head sadly over him, and goes into the bathroom. They are all looking as if they did not admire him, and nothing so dashes a temperamental man.*) I say, I have just thought of a splendid joke. (*They brighten.*) I shall pour my medicine into Nana's bowl, and she will drink it thinking it is milk! (*The pleasantry does not appeal, but he prepares the joke, listening for appreciation.*)

WENDY. Poor darling Nana!

MR. DARLING. You silly little things; to your beds every one of you; I am ashamed of you.

(*They steal to their beds as* MRS. DARLING *returns with the chocolate.*)

MRS. DARLING. Well, is it all over?

MICHAEL. Father didn't— (*Father glares.*)

MR. DARLING. All over, dear, quite satisfactorily. (NANA *comes back.*) Nana, good dog, good girl; I have put a little milk into your bowl. (*The bowl is by the kennel, and* NANA *begins to lap, only begins. She retreats into the kennel.*)

MRS. DARLING. What is the matter, Nana?

MR. DARLING (*uneasily*). Nothing, nothing.

MRS. DARLING (*smelling the bowl*). George, it is your medicine!

(*The children break into lamentation. He gives his wife an imploring look; he is begging for one smile, but does not get it. In consequence he goes from bad to worse.*)

MR. DARLING. It was only a joke. Much good my wearing myself to the bone trying to be funny in this house.

WENDY (*on her knees by the kennel*). Father, Nana is crying.

MR. DARLING. Coddle her; nobody coddles me. Oh dear no. I am only the bread-winner, why should I be coddled? Why, why, why?

MRS. DARLING. George, not so loud; the servants will hear you.

(*There is only one maid, absurdly small too, but they have got into the way of calling her the servants.*)

MR. DARLING (*defiant*). Let them hear me; bring in the whole world. (*The desperate man, who has not been in fresh air for days, has now lost all self-control.*) I refuse to allow that dog to lord it in my nursery for one hour longer. (NANA *supplicates him.*) In vain, in vain, the proper place for you is the yard, and there you go to be tied up this instant.

(NANA *again retreats into the kennel, and the children add their prayers to hers.*)

MRS. DARLING (*who knows how contrite he will be for this presently*). George, George, remember what I told you about that boy.

MR. DARLING. Am I master in this house or is she? (*To* NANA *fiercely*) Come along. (*He thunders at her, but she indicates that she has reasons not worth troubling him with for remaining where she is. He resorts to a false bonhomie.*) There, there, did she think he was angry with her, poor Nana? (*She wriggles a response in the affirmative.*) Good Nana, pretty Nana. (*She has seldom been called pretty, and it has the old effect. She plays rub-a-dub with her paws, which is how a dog blushes.*) She will come to her kind master, won't she? won't she? (*She advances, retreats, waggles her head, her tail, and eventually goes to him. He seizes her collar in an iron*

grip and amid the cries of his progeny drags her from the room. They listen, for her remonstrances are not inaudible.)

MRS. DARLING. Be brave, my dears.

WENDY. He is chaining Nana up!

(*This unfortunately is what he is doing, though we cannot see him. Let us hope that he then retires to his study, looks up the word 'temper' in his* Thesaurus, *and under the influence of those benign pages becomes a better man. In the meantime the children have been put to bed in unwonted silence, and* MRS. DARLING *lights the night-lights over the beds.*)

JOHN (*as the barking below goes on*). She is awfully unhappy.

WENDY. That is not Nana's unhappy bark. That is her bark when she smells danger.

MRS. DARLING (*remembering that boy*). Danger! Are you sure, Wendy?

WENDY (*the one of the family, for there is one in every family, who can be trusted to know or not to know*). Oh yes.

(*Her mother looks this way and that from the window.*)

JOHN. Is anything there?

MRS. DARLING. All quite quiet and still. Oh, how I wish I was not going out to dinner to-night.

MICHAEL. Can anything harm us, mother, after the night-lights are lit?

MRS. DARLING. Nothing, precious. They are the eyes a mother leaves behind her to guard her children.

(*Nevertheless we may be sure she means to tell* LIZA, *the little maid, to look in on them frequently till she comes home. She goes from bed to bed, after her custom, tucking them in and crooning a lullaby.*)

MICHAEL (*drowsily*). Mother, I'm glad of you.

MRS. DARLING (*with a last look round, her hand on the switch*). Dear night-lights that protect my sleeping babes, burn clear and steadfast to-night.

(*The nursery darkens and she is gone, intentionally leaving the door ajar. Something uncanny is going to happen, we expect, for a quiver has passed through the room, just sufficient to touch the night-lights. They blink three times one after the other and go out, precisely as children (whom familiarity has made them resemble) fall asleep. There is another light in the room now, no larger than* MRS. DARLING'S *fist, and in the time we have taken to say this it has been into the drawers and wardrobe and searched pockets, as it darts about looking for a certain shadow. Then the window is blown open, probably by the smallest and therefore*

most mischievous star, and PETER PAN *flies into the room. In so far as he is dressed at all it is in autumn leaves and cobwebs.*)

PETER (*in a whisper*). Tinker Bell, Tink, are you there? (*A jug lights up.*) Oh, do come out of that jug. (TINK *flashes hither and thither.*) Do you know where they put it? (*The answer comes as of a tinkle of bells; it is the fairy language.* PETER *can speak it, but it bores him.*) Which big box? This one? But which drawer? Yes, do show me. (TINK *pops into the drawer where the shadow is, but before* PETER *can reach it,* WENDY *moves in her sleep. He flies on to the mantelshelf as a hiding-place. Then, as she has not waked, he flutters over the beds as an easy way to observe the occupants, closes the window softly, wafts himself to the drawer and scatters its contents to the floor, as kings on their wedding day toss ha'pence to the crowd. In his joy at finding his shadow he forgets that he has shut up* TINK *in the drawer. He sits on the floor with the shadow, confident that he and it will join like drops of water. Then he tries to stick it on with soap from the bathroom, and this failing also, he subsides dejectedly on the floor. This wakens* WENDY, *who sits up, and is pleasantly interested to see a stranger.*)

WENDY (*courteously*). Boy, why are you crying?

(*He jumps up, and crossing to the foot of the bed bows to her in the fairy way.* WENDY, *impressed, bows to him from the bed.*)

PETER. What is your name?

WENDY (*well satisfied*). Wendy Moira Angela Darling. What is yours?

PETER (*finding it lamentably brief.*) Peter Pan.

WENDY. Is that all?

PETER (*biting his lip*). Yes.

WENDY (*politely*). I am so sorry.

PETER. It doesn't matter.

WENDY. Where do you live?

PETER. Second to the right and then straight on till morning.

WENDY. What a funny address!

PETER. No, it isn't.

WENDY. I mean, is that what they put on the letters?

PETER. Don't get any letters.

WENDY. But your mother gets letters?

PETER. Don't have a mother.

WENDY. Peter!

(*She leaps out of bed to put her arms round him, but he draws back; he does not know why, but he knows he must draw back.*)

PETER. You mustn't touch me.

WENDY. Why?

PETER. No one must ever touch me.

WENDY. Why?

PETER. I don't know.

(*He is never touched by any one in the play.*)

WENDY. No wonder you were crying.

PETER. I wasn't crying. But I can't get my shadow to stick on.

WENDY. It has come off! How awful. (*Looking at the spot where he had lain.*) Peter, you have been trying to stick it on with soap!

PETER (*snappily*). Well then?

WENDY. It must be sewn on.

PETER. What is 'sewn'?

WENDY. You are dreadfully ignorant.

PETER. No, I'm not.

WENDY. I will sew it on for you, my little man. But we must have more light. (*She touches something, and to his astonishment the room is illuminated.*) Sit here. I dare say it will hurt a little.

PETER (*a recent remark of hers rankling*). I never cry. (*She seems to attach the shadow. He tests the combination.*) It isn't quite itself yet.

WENDY. Perhaps I should have ironed it. (*It awakes and is as glad to be back with him as he to have it. He and his shadow dance together. He is showing off now. He crows like a cock. He would fly in order to impress* WENDY *further if he knew that there is anything unusual in that.*)

PETER. Wendy, look, look; oh the cleverness of me!

WENDY. You conceit; of course I did nothing!

PETER. You did a little.

WENDY (*wounded*). A little! If I am no use I can at least withdraw.

(*With one haughty leap she is again in bed with the sheet over her face. Popping on to the end of the bed the artful one appeals.*)

PETER. Wendy, don't withdraw. I can't help crowing, Wendy, when I'm pleased with myself. Wendy, one girl is worth more than twenty boys.

WENDY (*peeping over the sheet*). You really think so, Peter?

PETER. Yes, I do.

WENDY. I think it's perfectly sweet of you, and I shall get up again. (*They sit together on the side of the bed.*) I shall give you a kiss if you like.

PETER. Thank you. (*He holds out his hand.*)

WENDY (*aghast*). Don't you know what a kiss is?

PETER. I shall know when you give it me. (*Not to hurt his feelings she gives him her thimble.*) Now shall I give you a kiss?

WENDY (*primly*). If you please. (*He pulls an acorn button off his person and bestows it on her. She is shocked but considerate.*) I will wear it on this chain round my neck. Peter, how old are you?

PETER (*blithely*). I don't know, but quite young, Wendy. I ran away the day I was born.

WENDY. Ran away, why?

PETER. Because I heard father and mother talking of what I was to be when I became a man. I

want always to be a little boy and to have fun; so I ran away to Kensington Gardens and lived a long time among the fairies.

WENDY (*with great eyes*). You know fairies, Peter!

PETER (*surprised that this should be a recommendation*). Yes, but they are nearly all dead now. (*Baldly*) You see, Wendy, when the first baby laughed for the first time, the laugh broke into a thousand pieces and they all went skipping about, and that was the beginning of fairies. And now when every new baby is born its first laugh becomes a fairy. So there ought to be one fairy for every boy or girl.

WENDY (*breathlessly*). Ought to be? Isn't there?

PETER. Oh no. Children know such a lot now. Soon they don't believe in fairies, and every time a child says 'I don't believe in fairies' there is a fairy somewhere that falls down dead. (*He skips about heartlessly.*)

WENDY. Poor things!

PETER (*to whom this statement recalls a forgotten friend*). I can't think where she has gone. Tinker Bell, Tink, where are you?

WENDY (*thrilling*). Peter, you don't mean to tell me that there is a fairy in this room!

PETER (*flitting about in search*). She came with me. You don't hear anything, do you?

WENDY. I hear—the only sound I hear is like a tinkle of bells.

PETER. That is the fairy language. I hear it too.

WENDY. It seems to come from over there.

PETER (*with shameless glee*). Wendy, I believe I shut her up in that drawer! (*He releases* TINK, *who darts about in a fury using language it is perhaps as well we don't understand.*) You needn't say that; I'm very sorry, but how could I know you were in the drawer?

WENDY (*her eyes dancing in pursuit of the delicious creature*). Oh, Peter, if only she would stand still and let me see her!

PETER (*indifferently*). They hardly ever stand still.

(*To show that she can do even this* TINK *pauses between two ticks of the cuckoo clock.*)

WENDY. I see her, the lovely! where is she now?

PETER. She is behind the clock. Tink, this lady wishes you were her fairy. (*The answer comes immediately.*)

WENDY. What does she say?

PETER. She is not very polite. She says you are a great ugly girl, and that she is my fairy. You know, Tink, you can't be my fairy because I am a gentleman and you are a lady.

(TINK *replies.*)

WENDY. What did she say?

PETER. She said 'You silly ass.' She is quite a common girl, you know. She is called Tinker Bell because she mends the fairy pots and kettles.

(*They have reached a chair,* WENDY *in the ordinary way and* PETER *through a hole in the back.*)

WENDY. Where do you live now?

PETER. With the lost boys.

WENDY. Who are they?

PETER. They are the children who fall out of their prams when the nurse is looking the other way. If they are not claimed in seven days they are sent far away to the Never Land. I'm captain.

WENDY. What fun it must be.

PETER (*craftily*). Yes, but we are rather lonely. You see, Wendy, we have no female companionship.

WENDY. Are none of the other children girls?

PETER. Oh no; girls, you know, are much too clever to fall out of their prams.

WENDY. Peter, it is perfectly lovely the way you talk about girls. John there just despises us. (PETER, *for the first time, has a good look at* JOHN. *He then neatly tumbles him out of bed.*) You wicked! you are not captain here. (*She bends over her brother who is prone on the floor.*) After all he hasn't wakened, and you meant to be kind. (*Having now done her duty she forgets* JOHN, *who blissfully sleeps on.*) Peter, you may give me a kiss.

PETER (*cynically*). I thought you would want it back. (*He offers her the thimble.*)

WENDY (*artfully*). Oh dear, I didn't mean a kiss, Peter. I meant a thimble.

PETER (*only half placated*). What is that?

WENDY. It is like this. (*She leans forward to give a demonstration, but something prevents the meeting of their faces.*)

PETER (*satisfied*). Now shall I give you a thimble?

WENDY. If you please. (*Before he can even draw near she screams.*)

PETER. What is it?

WENDY. It was exactly as if some one were pulling my hair!

PETER. That must have been Tink. I never knew her so naughty before.

(TINK *speaks. She is in the jug again.*)

WENDY. What does she say?

PETER. She says she will do that every time I give you a thimble.

WENDY. But why?

PETER (*equally nonplussed*). Why, Tink? (*He has to translate the answer.*) She said 'You silly ass' again.

WENDY. She is very impertinent. (*They are sitting on the floor now.*) Peter, why did you come to our nursery window?

PETER. To try to hear stories. None of us knows any stories.

WENDY. How perfectly awful!

PETER. Do you know why swallows build in the eaves of houses? It is to listen to the stories. Wendy, your mother was telling you such a lovely story.

WENDY. Which story was it?

PETER. About the prince, and he couldn't find the lady who wore the glass slipper.

WENDY. That was Cinderella. Peter, he found her and they were happy ever after.

PETER. I am glad. (*They have worked their way along the floor close to each other, but he now jumps up.*)

WENDY. Where are you going?

PETER (*already on his way to the window*). To tell the other boys.

WENDY. Don't go, Peter. I know lots of stories. The stories I could tell to the boys!

PETER (*gleaming*). Come on! We'll fly.

WENDY. Fly? You can fly!

(*How he would like to rip those stories out of her; he is dangerous now.*)

PETER. Wendy, come with me.

WENDY. Oh dear, I mustn't. Think of mother. Besides, I can't fly.

PETER. I'll teach you.

WENDY. How lovely to fly!

PETER. I'll teach you how to jump on the wind's back and then away we go. Wendy, when you are sleeping in your silly bed you might be flying about with me, saying funny things to the stars. There are mermaids, Wendy, with long tails. (*She just succeeds in remaining on the nursery floor.*) Wendy, how we should all respect you.

(*At this she strikes her colours.*)

WENDY. Of course it's awfully fas-cin-a-ting! Would you teach John and Michael to fly too?

PETER (*indifferently*). If you like.

WENDY (*playing rum-tum on* JOHN). John, wake up; there is a boy here who is to teach us to fly.

JOHN. Is there? Then I shall get up. (*He raises his head from the floor.*) Hullo, I am up!

WENDY. Michael, open your eyes. This boy is to teach us to fly.

(*The sleepers are at once as awake as their father's razor; but before a question can be asked* NANA'S *bark is heard.*)

JOHN. Out with the light, quick, hide!

(*When the maid* LIZA, *who is so small that when she says she will never see ten again one can scarcely believe her, enters with a firm hand on the troubled* NANA'S *chain the room is in comparative darkness.*)

LIZA. There, you suspicious brute, they are perfectly safe, aren't they? Every one of the little an-

gels sound asleep in bed. Listen to their gentle breathing. (NANA's *sense of smell here helps to her undoing instead of hindering it. She knows that they are in the room.* MICHAEL, *who is behind the curtain window, is so encouraged by* LIZA's *last remark that he breathes too loudly,* NANA *knows that kind of breathing and tries to break from her keeper's control.*) No more of it, Nana. (*Wagging a finger at her*) I warn you if you bark again I shall go straight for master and missus and bring them home from the party, and then won't master whip you just! Come along, you naughty dog.

(*The unhappy* NANA *is led away. The children emerge exulting from their various hiding-places. In their brief absence from the scene strange things have been done to them; but it is not for us to reveal a mysterious secret of the stage. They look just the same.*)

JOHN. I say, can you really fly?

PETER. Look! (*He is now over their heads.*)

WENDY. Oh, how sweet!

PETER. I'm sweet, oh, I am sweet!

(*It looks so easy that they try it first from the floor and then from their beds, without encouraging results.*)

JOHN (*rubbing his knees*). How do you do it?

PETER (*descending*). You just think lovely wonderful thoughts and they lift you up in the air. (*He is off again.*)

JOHN. You are so nippy at it; couldn't you do it very slowly once? (PETER *does it slowly.*) I've got it now, Wendy. (*He tries; no, he has not got it, poor stay-at-home, though he knows the names of all the counties in England and* PETER *does not know one.*)

PETER. I must blow the fairy dust on you first. (*Fortunately his garments are smeared with it and he blows some dust on each.*) Now, try; try from the bed. Just wriggle your shoulders this way, and then let go.

(*The gallant* MICHAEL *is the first to let go, and is borne across the room.*)

MICHAEL (*with a yell that should have disturbed* LIZA). I flewed!

(JOHN *lets go, and meets* WENDY *near the bathroom door though they had both aimed in an opposite direction.*)

WENDY. Oh, lovely!

JOHN (*tending to be upside down*). How ripping!

MICHAEL (*playing whack on a chair*). I do like it!

THE THREE. Look at me, look at me, look at me!

(*They are not nearly so elegant in the air as* PETER, *but their heads have bumped the ceiling, and there is nothing more delicious than that.*)

JOHN (*who can even go backwards*). I say, why shouldn't we go out?

PETER. There are pirates.

JOHN. Pirates! (*He grabs his tall Sunday hat.*) Let us go at once!

(TINK *does not like it. She darts at their hair. From down below in the street the lighted window must present an unwonted spectacle; the shadows of children revolving in the room like a merry-go-round. This is perhaps what* MR. *and* MRS. DARLING *see as they come hurrying home from the party, brought by* NANA *who, you may be sure, has broken her chain.* PETER'S *accomplice, the little star, has seen them coming, and again the window blows open.*)

PETER (*as if he had heard the star whisper 'Cave'*). Now come!

(*Breaking the circle he flies out of the window over the trees of the square and over the housetops, and the others follow like a flight of birds. The broken-hearted father and mother arrive just in time to get a nip from* TINK *as she too sets out for the Never Land.*)

ACT II

THE NEVER LAND

When the blind goes up all is so dark that you scarcely know it has gone up. This is because if you were to see the island bang (as Peter would say) the wonders of it might hurt your eyes. If you all came in spectacles perhaps you could see it bang, but to make a rule of that kind would be a pity. The first thing seen is merely some whitish dots trudging along the sward, and you can guess from their tinkling that they are probably fairies of the commoner sort going home afoot from some party and having a cheery tiff by the way. Then Peter's star wakes up, and in the blink of it, which is much stronger than in our stars, you can make out masses of trees, and you think you see wild beasts stealing past to drink, though what you see is not the beasts themselves but only the shadows of them. They are really out pictorially to greet Peter in the way they think he would like them to greet him; and for the same reason the mermaids basking in the lagoon beyond the trees are carefully combing their hair; and for the same reason the pirates are landing invisibly from the longboat, invisibly to you but not to the redskins,

whom none can see or hear because they are on the war-path. The whole island, in short, which has been having a slack time in Peter's absence, is now in a ferment because the tidings has leaked out that he is on his way back; and everybody and everything know that they will catch it from him if they don't give satisfaction. While you have been told this the sun (another of his servants) has been bestirring himself. Those of you who may have thought it wiser after all to begin this Act in spectacles may now take them off.

What you see is the Never Land. You have often half seen it before, or even three-quarters, after the night-lights were lit, and you might then have beached your coracle on it if you had not always at the great moment fallen asleep. I dare say you have chucked things on to it, the things you can't find in the morning. In the daytime you think the Never Land is only make-believe, and so it is to the likes of you, but this is the Never Land come true. It is an open-air scene, a forest, with a beautiful lagoon beyond but not really far away, for the Never Land is very compact, not large and sprawly with tedious distances between one adventure and another, but nicely crammed. It is summer time on the trees and on the lagoon but winter on the river, which is not remarkable on Peter's island where all the four seasons may pass while you are filling a jug at the well.

Peter's home is at this very spot, but you could not point out the way into it even if you were told which is the entrance, not even if you were told that there are seven of them. You know now because you have just seen one of the lost boys emerge. The holes in these seven great hollow trees are the 'doors' down to Peter's home, and he made seven because, despite his cleverness, he thought seven boys must need seven doors.

The boy who has emerged from his tree is Slightly, who has perhaps been driven from the abode below by companions less musical than himself. Quite possibly a genius, Slightly has with him his home-made whistle to which he capers entrancingly, with no audience save a Never ostrich which is also musically inclined. Unable to imitate Slightly's graces the bird falls so low as to burlesque them and is driven from the entertainment. Other lost boys climb up the trunks or drop from branches, and now we see the six of them, all in the skins of animals they think they have shot, and so round and furry in them that if they fall they roll. Tootles is not the least brave though the most unfortunate of this gallant band. He has been in fewer adventures than any of them because the big things constantly happen while he has stepped round the corner; he will go off, for instance, in some quiet hour to gather firewood, and then when he returns the others will be sweeping up

the blood. Instead of souring his nature this has sweetened it and he is the humblest of the band. Nibs is more gay and debonair, Slightly more conceited. Slightly thinks he remembers the days before he was lost, with their manners and customs. Curly is a pickle, and so often has he had to deliver up his person when Peter said sternly, 'Stand forth the one who did this thing,' that now he stands forth whether he has done it or not. The other two are First Twin and Second Twin, who cannot be described because we should probably be describing the wrong one. Hunkering on the ground or peeping out of their holes, the six are not unlike village gossips gathered round the pump.

TOOTLES. Has Peter come back yet, Slightly?

SLIGHTLY (*with a solemnity that he thinks suits the occasion*). No, Tootles, no.

(*They are like dogs waiting for the master to tell them that the day has begun.*)

CURLY (*as if* PETER *might be listening*). I do wish he would come back.

TOOTLES. I am always afraid of the pirates when Peter is not here to protect us.

SLIGHTLY. I am not afraid of pirates. Nothing frightens me. But I do wish Peter would come back and tell us whether he has heard anything more about Cinderella.

SECOND TWIN (*with diffidence*). Slightly, I dreamt last night that the prince found Cinderella.

FIRST TWIN (*who is intellectually the superior of the two*). Twin, I think you should not have dreamt that, for I didn't, and Peter may say we oughtn't to dream differently, being twins, you know.

TOOTLES. I am awfully anxious about Cinderella. You see, not knowing anything about my own mother I am fond of thinking that she was rather like Cinderella.

(*This is received with derision.*)

NIBS. All I remember about my mother is that she often said to father, 'Oh, how I wish I had a cheque book of my own.' I don't know what a cheque book is, but I should just love to give my mother one.

SLIGHTLY (*as usual*). My mother was fonder of me than your mothers were of you. (*Uproar.*) Oh yes, she was. Peter had to make up names for you, but my mother had wrote my name on the pinafore I was lost in. 'Slightly Soiled'; that's my name.

(They fall upon him pugnaciously; not that they are really worrying about their mothers, who are now as important to them as a piece of string, but because any excuse is good enough for a shindy. Not for long is he belaboured, for a sound is heard that sends them scurrying down their holes; in a second of time the scene is bereft of human life. What they have heard

from near-by is a verse of the dreadful song with which on the Never Land the pirates stealthily trumpet their approach—

Yo ho, yo ho, the pirate life,
The flag of skull and bones,
A merry hour, a hempen rope,
And hey for Davy Jones!

The pirates appear upon the frozen river dragging a raft, on which reclines among cushions that dark and fearful man, CAPTAIN JAS HOOK. *A more villainous-looking brotherhood of men never hung in a row on Execution dock. Here, his great arms bare, pieces of eight in his ears as ornaments, is the handsome* CECCO, *who cut his name on the back of the governor of the prison at Gao. Heavier in the pull is the gigantic black who has had many names since the first one terrified dusky children on the banks of the Guidjo-mo.* BILL JUKES *comes next, every inch of him tattooed, the same* JUKES *who got six dozen on the* Walrus *from Flint. Following these are* COOKSON, *said to be* BLACK MURPHY'S *brother (but this was never proved); and* GENTLEMAN STARKEY, *once an usher in a school; and* SKYLIGHTS (*Morgan's Skylights*); *and* NOODLER, *whose hands are fixed on backwards; and the spectacled boatswain,* SMEE, *the only*

Nonconformist in HOOK'S *crew; and other ruffians long known and feared on the Spanish main.*

Cruelest jewel in that dark setting is HOOK *himself, cadaverous and blackavised, his hair dressed in long curls which look like black candles about to melt, his eyes blue as the forget-me-not and of a profound insensibility, save when he claws, at which time a red spot appears in them. He has an iron hook instead of a right hand, and it is with this he claws. He is never more sinister than when he is most polite, and the elegance of his diction, the distinction of his demeanour, show him one of a different class from his crew, a solitary among uncultured companions. This courtliness impresses even his victims on the high seas, who note that he always says 'Sorry' when prodding them along the plank. A man of indomitable courage, the only thing at which he flinches is the sight of his own blood, which is thick and of an unusual colour. At his public school they said of him that he 'bled yellow.' In dress he apes the dandiacal associated with Charles II., having heard it said in an earlier period of his career that he bore a strange resemblance to the ill-fated Stuarts. A holder of his own contrivance is in his mouth enabling him to smoke two cigars at*

once. Those, however, who have seen him in the flesh, which is an inadequate term for his earthly tenement, agree that the grimmest part of him is his iron claw.

They continue their distasteful singing as they disembark—

Avast, belay, yo ho, heave to,
A-pirating we go,
And if we're parted by a shot
We're sure to meet below!

NIBS, *the only one of the boys who has not sought safety in his tree, is seen for a moment near the lagoon, and* STARKEY'S *pistol is at once upraised. The captain twists his hook in him.*)

STARKEY (*abject*). Captain, let go!

HOOK. Put back that pistol, first.

STARKEY. 'Twas one of those boys you hate; I could have shot him dead.

HOOK. Ay, and the sound would have brought Tiger Lily's redskins on us. Do you want to lose your scalp?

SMEE (*wriggling his cutlass pleasantly*). That is true. Shall I after him, Captain, and tickle him with Johnny Corkscrew? Johnny is a silent fellow.

HOOK. Not now. He is only one, and I want to mischief all the seven. Scatter and look for them. (*The boatswain whistles his instructions, and the*

men disperse on their frightful errand. With none to hear save SMEE, HOOK *becomes confidential.*) Most of all I want their captain, Peter Pan. 'Twas he cut off my arm. I have waited long to shake his hand with this. (*Luxuriating*) Oh, I'll tear him!

SMEE (*always ready for a chat*). Yet I have oft heard you say your hook was worth a score of hands, for combing the hair and other homely uses.

HOOK. If I was a mother I would pray to have my children born with this instead of that (*his left arm creeps nervously behind him. He has a galling remembrance*). Smee, Pan flung my arm to a crocodile that happened to be passing by.

SMEE. I have often noticed your strange dread of crocodiles.

HOOK (*pettishly*). Not of crocodiles but of that one crocodile. (*He lays bare a lacerated heart.*) The brute liked my arm so much, Smee, that he has followed me ever since, from sea to sea, and from land to land, licking his lips for the rest of me.

SMEE (*looking for the bright side*). In a way it is a sort of compliment.

HOOK (*with dignity*). I want no such compliments; I want Peter Pan, who first gave the brute his taste for me. Smee, that crocodile would have had me before now, but by a lucky chance he swallowed a clock, and it goes tick, tick, tick, tick inside him; and so before he can reach me I hear the tick

and bolt. (*He emits a hollow rumble.*) Once I heard it strike six within him.

SMEE (*sombrely*). Some day the clock will run down, and then he'll get you.

HOOK (*a broken man*). Ay, that is the fear that haunts me. (*He rises.*) Smee, this seat is hot; odds, bobs, hammer and tongs, I am burning.

(*He has been sitting, he thinks, on one of the island mushrooms, which are of enormous size. But this is a hand-painted one placed here in tomes of danger to conceal a chimney. They remove it, and tell-tale smoke issues; also, alas, the sound of children's voices.*)

SMEE. A chimney!

HOOK (*avidly*). Listen! Smee, 'tis plain they live here, beneath the ground. (*He replaces the mushroom. His brain works tortuously.*)

SMEE (*hopefully*). Unrip your plan, Captain.

HOOK. To return to the boat and cook a large rich cake of jolly thickness with sugar on it, green sugar. There can be but one room below, for there is but one chimney. The silly moles had not the sense to see that they did not need a door apiece. We must leave the cake on the shore of the mermaids' lagoon. These boys are always swimming about there, trying to catch the mermaids. They will find the cake and gobble it up, because, having no mother, they don't know how dangerous 'tis to eat rich damp cake. They will die!

SMEE (*fascinated*). It is the wickedest, prettiest policy ever I heard of.

HOOK (*meaning well*). Shake hands on't.

SMEE. No, Captain, no.

(*He has to link with the hook, but he does not join in the song.*)

HOOK. Yo ho, yo ho, when I say 'paw,'
By fear they're overtook,
Naught's left upon your bones when you
Have shaken hands with Hook!

(*Frightened by a tug at his hand,* SMEE *is joining in the chorus when another sound stills them both. It is a tick, tick as of a clock, whose significance* HOOK *is, naturally, the first to recognise. 'The crocodile!' he cries, and totters from the scene.* SMEE *follows. A huge crocodile, of one thought compact, passes across, ticking, and oozes after them. The wood is now so silent that you may be sure it is full of redskins.* TIGER LILY *comes first. She is the belle of the Piccaninny tribe, whose braves would all have her to wife, but she wards them off with a hatchet. She puts her ear to the ground and listens, then beckons, and* GREAT BIG LITTLE PANTHER *and the tribe are around her, carpeting the ground. Far away some one treads on a dry leaf.*)

TIGER LILY. Pirates! (*They do not draw their*

knives; the knives slip into their hands.) Have um scalps? What you say?

PANTHER. Scalp um, oho, velly quick.

THE BRAVES (*in corroboration*). Ugh, ugh, wah.

(*A fire is lit and they dance round and over it till they seem part of the leaping flames.* TIGER LILY *invokes Manitou; the pipe of peace is broken; and they crawl off like a long snake that has not fed for many moons.* TOOTLES *peers after the tail and summons the other boys, who issue from their holes.*)

TOOTLES. They are gone.

SLIGHTLY (*almost losing confidence in himself*). I do wish Peter was here.

FIRST TWIN. H'sh! What is that? (*He is gazing at the lagoon and shrinks back.*) It is wolves, and they are chasing Nibs!

(*The baying wolves are upon them quicker than any boy can scuttle down his tree.*)

NIBS (*falling among his comrades*). Save me, save me!

TOOTLES. What should we do?

SECOND TWIN. What would Peter do?

SLIGHTLY. Peter would look at them through his legs; let us do what Peter would do.

(*The boys advance backwards, looking between their legs at the snarling red-eyed enemy, who trot away foiled.*)

FIRST TWIN (*swaggering*). We have saved you, Nibs. Did you see the pirates?

NIBS (*sitting up, and agreeably aware that the centre of interest is now to pass to him*). No, but I saw a wonderfuller thing, Twin. (*All mouths open for the information to be dropped into them.*) High over the lagoon I saw the loveliest great white bird. It is flying this way. (*They search the firmament.*)

TOOTLES. What kind of a bird, do you think?

NIBS (*awed*). I don't know; but it looked so weary, and as it flies it moans 'Poor Wendy.'

SLIGHTLY (*instantly*). I remember now there are birds called Wendies.

FIRST TWIN (*who has flown to a high branch*). See, it comes, the Wendy! (*They all see it now.*) How white it is! (*A dot of light is pursuing the bird malignantly.*)

TOOTLES. That is Tinker Bell. Tink is trying to hurt the Wendy. (*He makes a cup of his hands and calls*) Hullo, Tink! (*A response comes down in the fairy language.*) She says Peter wants us to shoot the Wendy.

NIBS. Let us do what Peter wishes.

SLIGHTLY. Ay, shoot it; quick, bows and arrows.

TOOTLES (*first with his bow*). Out of the way, Tink; I'll shoot it. (*His bolt goes home, and* WENDY, *who has been fluttering among the tree-tops in her white nightgown, falls straight to earth. No one*

could be more proud than TOOTLES.) I have shot the Wendy; Peter will be so pleased. (*From some tree on which* TINK *is roosting comes the tinkle we can now translate, 'You silly ass.'* TOOTLES *falters.*) Why do you say that? (*The others feel that he may have blundered, and draw away from* TOOTLES.)

SLIGHTLY (*examining the fallen one more minutely*). This is no bird; I think it must be a lady.

NIBS (*who would have preferred it to be a bird*). And Tootles has killed her.

CURLY. Now I see, Peter was bringing her to us. (*They wonder for what object.*)

SECOND TWIN. To take care of us? (*Undoubtedly for some diverting purpose.*)

OMNES (*though every one of them had wanted to have a shot at her*). Oh, Tootles!

TOOTLES (*gulping*). I did it. When ladies used to come to me in dreams I said 'Pretty mother,' but when she really came I shot her! (*He perceives the necessity of a solitary life for him.*) Friends, goodbye.

SEVERAL (*not very enthusiastic*). Don't go.

TOOTLES. I must; I am so afraid of Peter.

(*He has gone but a step toward oblivion when he is stopped by a crowing as of some victorious cock.*)

OMNES. Peter!

(*They make a paling of themselves in front of*

WENDY *as* PETER *skims round the tree-tops and reaches earth.*)

PETER. Greeting, boys! (*Their silence chafes him.*) I am back; why do you not cheer? Great news, boys, I have brought at last a mother for us all.

SLIGHTLY (*vaguely*). Ay, ay.

PETER. She flew this way; have you not seen her?

SECOND TWIN (*as* PETER *evidently thinks her important*). Oh mournful day!

TOOTLES (*making a break in the paling*). Peter, I will show her to you.

THE OTHERS (*closing the gap*). No, no.

TOOTLES (*majestically*). Stand back all, and let Peter see.

(*The paling dissolves, and* PETER *sees* WENDY *prone on the ground.*)

PETER. Wendy, with an arrow in her heart! (*He plucks it out.*) Wendy is dead. (*He is not so much pained as puzzled.*)

CURLY. I thought it was only flowers that die.

PETER. Perhaps she is frightened at being dead? (*None of them can say as to that*). Whose arrow? (*Not one of them looks at* TOOTLES.)

TOOTLES. Mine, Peter.

PETER (*raising it as a dagger*). Oh dastard hand!

TOOTLES (*kneeling and baring his breast*). Strike, Peter; strike true.

PETER (*undergoing a singular experience*). I cannot strike; there is something stays my hand.

(*In fact* WENDY's *arm has risen.*) —

NIBS. 'Tis she, the Wendy lady. See, her arm. (*To help a friend*) I think she said 'Poor Tootles.'

PETER (*investigating*). She lives!

SLIGHTLY (*authoritatively*). The Wendy lady lives.

(*The delightful feeling that they have been cleverer than they thought comes over them and they applaud themselves.*)

PETER (*holding up a button that is attached to her chain*). See, the arrow struck against this. It is a kiss I gave her; it has saved her life.

SLIGHTLY. I remember kisses; let me see it. (*He takes it in his hand.*) Ay, that is a kiss.

PETER. Wendy, get better quickly and I'll take you to see the mermaids. She is awfully anxious to see a mermaid.

(TINKER BELL, *who may have been off visiting her relations, returns to the wood and, under the impression that* WENDY *has been got rid of, is whistling as gaily as a canary. She is not wholly heartless, but is so small that she has only room for one feeling at a time.*)

CURLY. Listen to Tink rejoicing because she thinks — the Wendy is dead! (*Regardless of spoiling another's pleasure*) Tink, the Wendy lives.

(TINK *gives expression to fury.*)

SECOND TWIN (*tell-tale*). It was she who said that you wanted us to shoot the Wendy.

PETER. She said that? Then listen, Tink, I am your friend no more. (*There is a note of acerbity in* TINK'S *reply; it may mean 'Who wants you?'*) Begone from me for ever. (*Now it is a very wet tinkle.*)

CURLY. She is crying.

TOOTLES. She says she is your fairy.

PETER (*who knows they are not worth worrying* about). Oh well, not for ever, but for a whole week.

(TINK *goes off sulking, no doubt with the intention of giving all her friends an entirely false impression of* WENDY'S *appearance.*)

Now what shall we do with Wendy?

CURLY. Let us carry her down into the house.

SLIGHTLY. Ay, that is what one does with ladies.

PETER. No, you must not touch her; it wouldn't be sufficiently respectful.

SLIGHTLY. That is what I was thinking.

TOOTLES. But if she lies there she will die.

SLIGHTLY. Ay, she will die. It is a pity, but there is no way out.

PETER. Yes, there is. Let us build a house around her! (*Cheers again, meaning that no difficulty baffles* PETER.) Leave all to me. Bring the best of what we have. Gut our house. Be sharp. (*They race down their trees.*)

(*While* PETER *is engrossed in measuring* WENDY

so that the house may fit her, JOHN *and* MICHAEL, *who have probably landed on the island with a bump, wander forward, so draggled and tired that if you were to ask* MICHAEL *whether he is awake or asleep he would probably answer 'I haven't tried yet.'*)

MICHAEL (*bewildered*). John, John, wake up. Where is Nana, John?

JOHN (*with the help of one eye but not always the same eye*). It is true, we did fly! (*Thankfully*) And here is Peter. Peter, is this the place?

(PETER, *alas, has already forgotten them, as soon maybe he will forget* WENDY. *The first thing she should do now that she is here is to sew a handkerchief for him, and knot it as a jog to his memory.*)

PETER (*curtly*). Yes.

MICHAEL. Where is Wendy? (PETER *points.*)

JOHN (*who still wears his hat*). She is asleep.

MICHAEL. John, let us wake her and get her to make supper for us.

(*Some of the boys emerge, and he pinches one.*) John, look at them!

PETER (*still house-building*). Curly, see that these boys help in the building of the house.

JOHN. Build a house?

CURLY. For the Wendy.

JOHN (*feeling that there must be some mistake here*). For Wendy? Why, she is only a girl.

CURLY. That is why we are her servants.

JOHN (*dazed*). Are you Wendy's servants?

PETER. Yes, and you also. Away with them. (*In another moment they are woodsmen hacking at trees, with* CURLY *as overseer.*) Slightly, fetch a doctor. (SLIGHTLY *reels and goes. He returns professionally in* JOHN'S *hat.*) Please, sir, are you a doctor?

SLIGHTLY (*trembling in his desire to give satisfaction*). Yes, my little man.

PETER. Please, sir, a lady lies very ill.

SLIGHTLY (*taking care not to fall over her*). Tut, tut, where does she lie?

PETER. In yonder glade. (*It is a variation of a game they play.*)

SLIGHTLY. I will put a glass thing in her mouth. (*He inserts an imaginary thermometer in* WENDY'S *mouth and gives it a moment to record its verdict. He shakes it and then consults it.*)

PETER (*anxiously*). How is she?

SLIGHTLY. Tut, tut, this has cured her.

PETER (*leaping joyously*). I am glad.

SLIGHTLY. I will call again in the evening. Give her beef tea out of a cup with a spout to it, tut, tut.

(*The boys are running up with odd articles of furniture.*)

PETER (*with an already fading recollection of the*

Darling nursery). These are not good enough for Wendy. How I wish I knew the kind of house she would prefer!

FIRST TWIN. Peter, she is moving in her sleep.

TOOTLES (*opening* WENDY'S *mouth and dazing down into the depths*). Lovely!

PETER. Oh, Wendy, if you could sing the kind of house you would like to have.

(*It is as if she had heard him.*)

WENDY (*without opening her eyes*).

I wish I had a woodland house,
The littlest ever seen,
With funny little red walls
And roof of mossy green.

(*In the time she sings this and two other verses, such is the urgency of* PETER'S *silent orders that they have knocked down trees, laid a foundation and put up the walls and roof, so that she is now hidden from view. 'Windows,' cries* PETER, *and* CURLY *rushes them in, 'Roses,' and* TOOTLES *arrives breathless with a festoon for the door. Thus springs into existence the most delicious little house for beginners.*)

FIRST TWIN. I think it is finished.

PETER. There is no knocker on the door. (TOOTLES *hangs up the sole of his shoe.*) There is no chimney;

we must have a chimney. (*They await his deliberations anxiously.*)

JOHN (*unwisely critical*). It certainly does need a chimney.

(*He is again wearing his hat, which* PETER *seizes, knocks the top off it and places on the roof. In the friendliest way smoke begins to come out of the hat.*)

PETER (*with his hand on the knocker*). All look your best; the first impression is awfully important. (*He knocks, and after a dreadful moment of suspense, in which they cannot help wondering if any one is inside, the door opens and who should come out but* WENDY! *She has evidently been tidying a little. She is quite surprised to find that she has nine children.*)

WENDY (*genteelly*). Where am I?

SLIGHTLY. Wendy lady, for you we built this house.

NIBS and TOOTLES. Oh, say you are pleased.

WENDY (*stroking the pretty thing*). Lovely, darling house!

FIRST TWIN. And we are your children.

WENDY (*affecting surprise*). Oh?

OMNES (*kneeling, with outstretched arms*). Wendy lady, be our mother! (*Now that they know it is pretend they acclaim her greedily.*)

WENDY (*not to make herself too cheap*). Ought

I? Of course it is frightfully fascinating; but you see I am only a little girl; I have no real experience.

OMNES. That doesn't matter. What we need is just a nice motherly person.

WENDY. Oh dear, I feel that is just exactly what I am.

OMNES. It is, it is, we saw it at once.

WENDY. Very well then, I will do my best. (*In their glee they go dancing obstreperously round the little house, and she sees she must be firm with them as well as kind.*) Come inside at once, you naughty children, I am sure your feet are damp. And before I put you to bed I have just time to finish the story of Cinderella.

(*They all troop into the enchanting house, whose not least remarkable feature is that it holds them. A vision of* LIZA *passes, not perhaps because she has any right to be there; but she has so few pleasures and is so young that we just let her have a peep at the little house. By and by* PETER *comes out and marches up and down with drawn sword, for the pirates can be heard carousing far away on the lagoon, and the wolves are on the prowl. The little house, its walls so red and its roof so mossy, looks very cosy and safe, with a bright light showing through the blind, the chimney smoking beautifully, and* PETER *on guard. On our last sight*

of him it is so dark that we just guess he is the little figure who has fallen asleep by the door. Dots of light come and go. They are inquisitive fairies having a look at the house. Any other child in their way they would mischief, but they just tweak PETER'S *nose and pass on. Fairies, you see, can touch him.*)

ACT III

THE MERMAIDS' LAGOON

It is the end of a long playful day on the lagoon. The sun's rays have persuaded him to give them another five minutes, for one more race over the waters before he gathers them up and lets in the moon. There are many mermaids here, going plop-plop, and one might attempt to count the tails did they not flash and disappear so quickly. At times a lovely girl leaps in the air seeking to get rid of her excess of scales, which fall in a silver shower as she shakes them off. From the coral grottoes beneath the lagoon, where are the mermaids' bed-chambers, comes fitful music.

One of the most bewitching of these blue-eyed creatures is lying lazily on Marooners' Rock, combing her long tresses and noting effects in a transparent shell. Peter and his band are in the water unseen behind the rock, whither they have tracked her as if she were a trout, and at a signal ten pairs of arms come whack upon the mermaid to enclose her. Alas, this is only what was meant to happen, for she hears the signal (which is the crow of a cock) and slips through their arms into the water. It has been such a near

thing that there are scales on some of their hands. They climb on to the rock crestfallen.

WENDY (*preserving her scales as carefully as if they were rare postage stamps*). I did so want to catch a mermaid.

PETER (*getting rid of his*). It is awfully difficult to catch a mermaid.

(*The mermaids at times find it just as difficult to catch him, though he sometimes joins them in their one game, which consists in lazily blowing their bubbles into the air and seeing who can catch them. The number of bubbles* PETER *has flown away with! When the weather grows cold mermaids migrate to the other side of the world, and he once went with a great shoal of them half the way.*)

They are such cruel creatures, Wendy, that they try to pull boys and girls like you into the water and drown them.

WENDY (*too guarded by this time to ask what he means precisely by 'like you,' though she is very desirous of knowing*). How hateful!

(*She is slightly different in appearance now, rather rounder, while* JOHN *and* MICHAEL *are not quite so round. The reason is that when new lost children arrive at his underground home* PETER *finds new trees for them to go up and*

down by, and instead of fitting the tree to them he makes them fit the tree. Sometimes it can be done by adding or removing garments, but if you are bumpy, or the tree is an odd shape, he has things done to you with a roller, and after that you fit.

The other boys are now playing King of the Castle, throwing each other into the water, taking headers and so on; but these two continue to talk.)

PETER. Wendy, this is a fearfully important rock. It is called Marooners' Rock. Sailors are marooned, you know, when their captain leaves them on a rock and sails away.

WENDY. Leaves them on this little rock to drown?

PETER (*lightly*). Oh, they don't live long. Their hands are tied, so that they can't swim. When the tide is full this rock is covered with water, and then the sailor drowns.

(WENDY *is uneasy as she surveys the rock, which is the only one in the lagoon and no larger than a table. Since she last looked around a threatening change has come over the scene. The sun has gone, but the moon has not come. What has come is a cold shiver across the waters which has sent all the wiser mermaids to their coral recesses. They know that evil is creeping over the lagoon. Of the boys* PETER *is of course the first*

to scent it, and he has leapt to his feet before the words strike the rock—

'And if we're parted by a shot
We're sure to meet below.'

The games on the rock and around it end so abruptly that several divers are checked in the air. There they hang waiting for the word of command from PETER. *When they get it they strike the water simultaneously, and the rock is at once as bare as if suddenly they had been blown off it. Thus the pirates find it deserted when their dinghy strikes the rock and is nearly stove in by the concussion.*)

SMEE. Luff, you spalpeen, luff! (*They are* SMEE *and* STARKEY, *with* TIGER LILY, *their captive, bound hand and foot.*) What we have got to do is to hoist the redskin on to the rock and leave her there to drown.

(*To one of her race this is an end darker than death by fire or torture, for it is written in the laws of the Piccaninnies that there is no path through water to the happy hunting ground. Yet her face is impassive; she is the daughter of a chief and must die as a chief's daughter; it is enough.*)

STARKEY (*chagrined because she does not mewl*). No mewling. This is your reward for prowling round the ship with a knife in your mouth.

TIGER LILY (*stoically*). Enough said.

SMEE (*who would have preferred a farewell palaver*). So that's it! On to the rock with her, mate.

STARKEY (*experiencing for perhaps the last time the stirrings of a man*). Not so rough, Smee; roughish, but not so rough.

SMEE (*dragging her on to the rock*). It is the captain's orders.

(*A stave has in some past time been driven into the rock, probably to mark the burial place of hidden treasure, and to this they moor the dinghy.*)

WENDY (*in the water*). Poor Tiger Lily!

STARKEY. What was that? (*The children bob.*)

PETER (*who can imitate the captain's voice so perfectly that even the author has a dizzy feeling that at times he was really* HOOK). Ahoy there, you lubbers!

STARKEY. It is the captain; he must be swimming out to us.

SMEE (*calling*). We have put the redskin on the rock, Captain.

PETER. Set her free.

SMEE. But, Captain—

PETER. Cut her bonds, or I'll plunge my hook in you.

SMEE. This is queer!

STARKEY (*unmanned*). Let us follow the captain's orders.

(*They undo the thongs and* TIGER LILY *slides between their legs into the lagoon, forgetting in her haste to utter her war-cry, but* PETER *utters it for her, so naturally that even the lost boys are deceived. It is at this moment that the voice of the true* HOOK *is heard.*)

HOOK. Boat ahoy!

SMEE (*relieved*). It is the captain.

(HOOK *is swimming, and they help him to scale the rock. He is in gloomy mood.*)

STARKEY. Captain, is all well?

SMEE. He sighs.

STARKEY. He sighs again.

SMEE (*counting*). And yet a third time he sighs. (*With foreboding*) What's up, Captain?

HOOK (*who has perhaps found the large rich damp cake untouched*). The game is up. Those boys have found a mother!

STARKEY. Oh evil day!

SMEE. What is a mother?

WENDY (*horrified*). He doesn't know!

HOOK (*sharply*). What was that?

(PETER *makes the splash of a mermaid's tail.*)

STARKEY. One of them mermaids.

HOOK. Dost not know, Smee? A mother is— (*He finds it more difficult to explain than he had expected, and looks about him for an illustration. He finds one in a great bird which drifts past in a nest as*

large as the roomiest basin.) There is a lesson in mothers for you! The nest must have fallen into the water, but would the bird desert her eggs? (PETER, *who is now more or less off his head, makes the sound of a bird answering in the negative. The nest is borne out of sight.*)

STARKEY. Maybe she is hanging about here to protect Peter?

(HOOK's *face clouds still further and* PETER *just manages not to call out that he needs no protection.*)

SMEE (*not usually a man of ideas*). Captain, could we not kidnap these boys' mother and make her our mother?

HOOK. Obesity and bunions, 'tis a princely scheme. We will seize the children, make them walk the plank, and Wendy shall be our mother!

WENDY. Never! (*Another splash from* PETER.)

HOOK. What say you, bullies?

SMEE. There is my hand on't.

STARKEY. And mine.

HOOK. And there is my hook. Swear. (*All swear.*) But I had forgot; where is the redskin?

SMEE (*shaken*). That is all right, Captain; we let her go.

HOOK (*terrible*). Let her go?

SMEE. 'Twas your own orders, Captain.

STARKEY (*whimpering*). You called over the water to us to let her go.

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HOOK. Brimstone and gall, what cozening is here? (*Disturbed by their faithful faces*) Lads, I gave no such order.

SMEE. 'Tis passing queer.

HOOK (*addressing the immensities*). Spirit that haunts this dark lagoon to-night, dost hear me?

PETER (*in the same voice*). Odds, bobs, hammer and tongs, I hear you.

HOOK (*gripping the stave for support*). Who are you, stranger, speak.

PETER (*who is only too ready to speak*). I am Jas Hook, Captain of the *Jolly Roger*.

HOOK (*now white to the gills*). No, no, you are not.

PETER. Brimstone and gall, say that again and I'll cast anchor in you.

HOOK. If you are Hook, come tell me, who am I?

PETER. A codfish, only a codfish.

HOOK (*aghast*). A codfish?

SMEE (*drawing back from him*). Have we been captained all this time by a codfish?

STARKEY. It's lowering to our pride.

HOOK (*feeling that his ego is slipping from him*). Don't desert me, bullies.

PETER (*top-heavy*). Paw, fish, paw!

(*There is a touch of the feminine in* HOOK, *as in all the greatest pirates, and it prompts him to try the guessing game.*)

HOOK. Have you another name?

PETER (*falling to the lure*). Ay, ay.

HOOK (*thirstily*). Vegetable?

PETER. No.

HOOK. Mineral?

PETER. No.

HOOK. Animal?

PETER (*after a hurried consultation with* TOOTLES). Yes.

HOOK. Man?

PETER (*with scorn*). No.

HOOK. Boy?

PETER. Yes.

HOOK. Ordinary boy?

PETER. No!

HOOK. Wonderful boy?

PETER (*to* WENDY'S *distress*). Yes!

HOOK. Are you in England?

PETER. No.

HOOK. Are you here?

PETER. Yes.

HOOK (*beaten, though he feels he has very nearly got it*). Smee, you ask him some questions.

SMEE (*rummaging his brains*). I can't think of a thing.

PETER. Cant guess, can't guess! (*Foundering in his cockiness*) Do you give it up?

HOOK (*eagerly*). Yes.

PETER. All of you?

SMEE and STARKEY. Yes.

PETER (*crowing*). Well, then, I am Peter Pan!

(*Now they have him.*)

HOOK. Pan! Into the water, Smee. Starkey, mind the boat. Take him dead or alive!

PETER (*who still has all his baby teeth*). Boys, lam into the pirates!

(*For a moment the only two we can see are in the dinghy, where* JOHN *throws himself on* STARKEY. STARKEY *wriggles into the lagoon and* JOHN *leaps so quickly after him that he reaches it first. The impression left on* STARKEY *is that he is being attacked by the* TWINS. *The water becomes stained. The dinghy drifts away. Here and there a head shows in the water, and once it is the head of the crocodile. In the growing gloom some strike at their friends,* SLIGHTLY *getting* TOOTLES *in the fourth rib while he himself is pinked by* CURLY. *It looks as if the boys were getting the worse of it, which is perhaps just as well at this point, because* PETER, *who will be the determining factor in the end, has a perplexing way of changing sides if he is winning too easily.* HOOK'S *iron claw makes a circle of black water round him from which opponents flee like fishes. There is only one prepared to enter that dreadful circle. His name is* PAN.

Strangely, it is not in the water that they meet. HOOK *has risen to the rock to breathe, and at the same moment* PETER *scales it on the opposite side. The rock is now wet and as slippery as a ball, and they have to crawl rather than climb. Suddenly they are face to face.* PETER *gnashes his pretty teeth with joy, and is gathering himself for the spring when he sees he is higher up the rock than his foe. Courteously he waits;* HOOK *sees his intention, and taking advantage of it claws twice.* PETER *is untouched, but unfairness is what he never can get used to, and in his bewilderment he rolls off the rock. The crocodile, whose tick has been drowned in the strife, rears its jaws, and* HOOK, *who has almost stepped into them, is pursued by it to land. All is quiet on the lagoon now, not a sound save little waves nibbling at the rock, which is smaller than when we last looked at it. Two boys appear with the dinghy, and the others despite their wounds climb into it. They send the cry* 'PETER—WENDY' *across the waters, but no answer comes.*)

NIBS. They must be swimming home.

JOHN. Or flying.

FIRST TWIN. Yes, that is it. Let us be off and call to them as we go.

(*The dinghy disappears with its load, whose*

hearts would sink it if they knew of the peril of WENDY *and her captain. From near and far away come the cries* 'PETER—WENDY' *till we no longer hear them.*

Two small figures are now on the rock, but they have fainted. A mermaid who has dared to come back in the stillness stretches up her arms and is slowly pulling WENDY *into the water to drown her.* WENDY *starts up just in time.*)

WENDY. Peter! (*He rouses himself and looks around him.*) Where are we, Peter?

PETER. We are on the rock, but it is getting smaller. Soon the water will be over it. Listen!

(*They can hear the wash of the relentless little waves.*)

WENDY. We must go.

PETER. Yes.

WENDY. Shall we swim or fly?

PETER. Wendy, do you think you could swim or fly to the island without me?

WENDY. You know I couldn't, Peter; I am just a beginner.

PETER. Hook wounded me twice. (*He believes it; he is so good at pretend that he feels the pain, his arms hang limp.*) I can neither swim nor fly.

WENDY. Do you mean we shall both be drowned?

PETER. Look how the water is rising!

(*They cover their faces with their hands. Something touches* WENDY *as lightly as a kiss.*)

PETER (*with little interest*). It must be the tail of the kite we made for Michael; you remember it tore itself out of his hands and floated away. (*He looks up and sees the kite sailing overhead.*) The kite! Why shouldn't it carry you? (*He grips the tail and pulls, and the kite responds.*)

WENDY. Both of us!

PETER. It can't lift two. Michael and Curly tried.

(*She knows very well that if it can lift her it can lift him also, for she has been told by the boys as a deadly secret that one of the queer things about him is that he is no weight at all. But it is a forbidden subject.*)

WENDY. I won't go without you. Let us draw lots which is to stay behind.

PETER. And you a lady, never! (*The tail is in her hands, and the kite is tugging hard. She holds out her mouth to* PETER, *but he knows they cannot do that.*) Ready, Wendy!

(*The kite draws her out of sight across the lagoon.*

The waters are lapping over the rock now, and PETER *knows that it will soon be submerged. Pale rays of light mingle with the moving clouds, and from the coral grottoes is to be heard a sound, at once the most musical and the most*

melancholy in the Never Land, the mermaids calling to the moon to rise. PETER *is afraid at last, and a tremor runs through him, like a shudder passing over the lagoon; but on the lagoon one shudder follows another till there are hundreds of them, and he feels just the one.)*

PETER (*with a drum beating in his breast as if he were a real boy at last.*) To die will be an awfully big adventure.

(*The blind rises again, and the lagoon is now suffused with moonlight. He is on the rocks still, but the water is over his feet. The nest is borne nearer, and the bird, after cooing a message to him, leaves it and wings her way upwards.* PETER, *who knows the bird language, slips into the nest, first removing the two eggs and placing them in* STARKEY'S *hat, which has been left on the stave. The hat drifts away from the rock, but he uses the stave as a mast. The wind is driving him toward the open sea. He takes off his shirt, which he had forgotten to remove while bathing, and unfurls it as a sail. His vessel tacks, and he passes from sight, naked and victorious. The bird returns and sits on the hat.*)

ACT IV

THE HOME UNDER THE GROUND

We see simultaneously the home under the ground with the children in it and the wood above ground with the redskins on it. Below, the children are gobbling their evening meal; above, the redskins are squatting in their blankets near the little house guarding the children from the pirates. The only way of communicating between these two parties is by means of the hollow trees.

The home has an earthen floor, which is handy for digging in if you want to go fishing; and owing to there being so many entrances there is not much wall space. The table at which the lost ones are sitting is a board on top of a live tree trunk, which has been cut flat but has such growing pains that the board rises as they eat, and they have sometimes to pause in their meals to cut a bit more off the trunk. Their seats are pumpkins or the large gay mushrooms of which we have seen an imitation one concealing the chimney. There is an enormous fireplace which is in almost any part of the room where you care to light it, and across this Wendy has stretched strings, made of fibre, from which she hangs her

washing. There are also various tomfool things in the room of no use whatever.

Michael's basket bed is nailed high up on the wall as if to protect him from the cat, but there is no indication at present of where the others sleep. At the back between two of the tree trunks is a grindstone, and near it is a lovely hole, the size of a band-box, with a gay curtain drawn across so that you cannot see what is inside. This is Tink's withdrawing-room and bedchamber, and it is just as well that you cannot see inside, for it is so exquisite in its decoration and in the personal apparel spread out on the bed that you could scarcely resist making off with something. Tink is within at present, as one can guess from a glow showing through the chinks. It is her own glow, for though she has a chandelier for the look of the thing, of course she lights her residence herself. She is probably wasting valuable time just now wondering whether to put on the smoky blue or the apple-blossom.

All the boys except Peter are here, and Wendy has the head of the table, smiling complacently at their captivating ways, but doing her best at the same time to see that they keep the rules about hands-off-the-table, no-two-to-speak-at-once, and so on. She is wearing romantic woodland garments, sewn by herself, with red berries in her hair which go charmingly with her complexion, as she knows; indeed

she searched for red berries the morning after she reached the island. The boys are in picturesque attire of her contrivance, and if these don't always fit well the fault is not hers but the wearers', for they constantly put on each other's things when they put on anything at all. Michael is in his cradle on the wall. First Twin is apart on a high stool and wears a dunce's cap, another invention of Wendy's, but not wholly successful because everybody wants to be dunce.

It is a pretend meal this evening, with nothing whatever on the table, not a mug, nor a crust, nor a spoon. They often have these suppers and like them on occasions as well as the other kind, which consist chiefly of bread-fruit, tappa rolls, yams, mammee apples and banana splash, washed down with calabashes of poe-poe. The pretend meals are not Wendy's idea; indeed she was rather startled to find, on arriving, that Peter knew of no other kind, and she is not absolutely certain even now that he does eat the other kind, though no one appears to do it more heartily. He insists that the pretend meals should be partaken of with gusto, and we see his band doing their best to obey orders.

WENDY (*her fingers to her ears, for their chatter and clatter are deafening*). Si-lence! Is your mug empty, Slightly?

SLIGHTLY (*who would not say this if he had a mug*). Not quite empty, thank you.

NIBS. Mummy, he has not even begun to drink his poe-poe.

SLIGHTLY (*seizing his chance, for this is tale-bearing*). I complain of Nibs!

(JOHN *holds up his hand.*)

WENDY. Well, John?

JOHN. May I sit in Peter's chair as he is not here?

WENDY. In your father's chair? Certainly not.

JOHN. He is not really our father. He did not even know how to be a father till I showed him.

(*This is insubordination.*)

SECOND TWIN. I complain of John!

(*The gentle* TOOTLES *raises his hand.*)

TOOTLES (*who has the poorest opinion of himself*). I don't suppose Michael would let me be baby?

MICHAEL. No, I won't.

TOOTLES. May I be dunce?

FIRST TWIN (*from his perch*). No. It's awfully difficult to be dunce.

TOOTLES. As I can't be anything important would any of you like to see me do a trick?

OMNES. No.

TOOTLES (*subsiding*). I hadn't really any hope.

(*The tale-telling breaks out again.*)

NIBS. Slightly is coughing on the table.

CURLY. The twins began with tappa rolls.

SLIGHTLY. I complain of Nibs!

NIBS. I complain of Slightly!

WENDY. Oh dear, I am sure I sometimes think that spinsters are to be envied.

MICHAEL. Wendy, I am too big for a cradle.

WENDY. You are the littlest, and a cradle is such a nice homely thing to have about a house. You others can clear away now. (*She sits down on a pumpkin near the fire to her usual evening occupation, darning.*) Every heel with a hole in it!

(*The boys clear away with dispatch, washing dishes they don't have in a non-existent sink and stowing them in a cupboard that isn't there. Instead of sawing the table-leg to-night they crush it into the ground like a concertina, and are now ready for play, in which they indulge hilariously.*

A movement of the Indians draws our attention to the scene above. Hitherto, with the exception of PANTHER, *who sits on guard on top of the little house, they have been hunkering in their blankets, mute but picturesque; now all rise and prostrate themselves before the majestic figure of* PETER, *who approaches through the forest carrying a gun and game bag. It is not exactly a gun. He often wanders away alone with this weapon, and when he comes back you*

are never absolutely certain whether he has had an adventure or not. He may have forgotten it so completely that he says nothing about it; and then when you go out you find the body. On the other hand he may say a great deal about it, and yet you never find the body. Sometimes he comes home with his face scratched, and tells WENDY, *as a thing of no importance, that he got these marks from the little people for cheeking them at a fairy wedding, and she listens politely, but she is never quite sure, you know; indeed the only one who is sure about anything on the island is* PETER.)

PETER. The Great White Father is glad to see the Piccaninny braves protecting his wigwam from the pirates.

TIGER LILY. The Great White Father save me from pirates. Me his velly nice friend now; no let pirates hurt him.

BRAVES. Ugh, ugh, wah!

TIGER LILY. Tiger Lily has spoken.

PANTHER. Loola, loola! Great Big Little Panther has spoken.

PETER. It is well. The Great White Father has spoken.

(*This has a note of finality about it, with the implied 'And now shut up,' which is never far from the courteous receptions of well-meaning*

inferiors by born leaders of men. He descends his tree, not unheard by WENDY.)

WENDY. Children, I hear your father's step. He likes you to meet him at the door. (PETER *scatters pretend nuts among them and watches sharply to see that they crunch with relish.*) Peter, you just spoil them, you know!

JOHN (*who would be incredulous if he dare*). Any sport, Peter?

PETER. Two tigers and a pirate.

JOHN (*boldly*). Where are their heads?

PETER (*contracting his little brows*). In the bag.

JOHN. (*No, he doesn't say it. He backs away.*)

WENDY (*peeping into the bag*). They are beauties! (*She has learned her lesson.*)

FIRST TWIN. Mummy, we all want to dance.

WENDY. The mother of such an armful dance!

SLIGHTLY. As it is Saturday night?

(*They have long lost count of the days, but always if they want to do anything special they say this is Saturday night, and then they do it.*)

WENDY. Of course it is Saturday night, Peter? (*He shrugs an indifferent assent.*) On with your nighties first.

(*They disappear into various recesses, and* PETER *and* WENDY *with her darning are left by the fire to dodder parentally. She emphasises it by humming a verse of 'John Anderson my Jo,'*

which has not the desired effect on PETER. *She is too loving to be ignorant that he is not loving enough, and she hesitates like one who knows the answer to her question.*)

What is wrong, Peter?

PETER (*scared*). It is only pretend, isn't it, that I am their father?

WENDY (*drooping*). Oh yes.

(*His sigh of relief is without consideration for her feelings.*)

But they are ours, Peter, yours and mine.

PETER (*determined to get at facts, the only things that puzzle him*). But not really?

WENDY. Not if you don't wish it.

PETER. I don't.

WENDY (*knowing she ought not to probe but driven to it by something within*). What are your exact feelings for me, Peter?

PETER (*in the class-room*). Those of a devoted son, Wendy.

WENDY (*turning away*). I thought so.

PETER. You are so puzzling. Tiger Lily is just the same; there is something or other she wants to be to me, but she says it is not my mother.

WENDY (*with spirit*). No, indeed it isn't.

PETER. Then what is it?

WENDY. It isn't for a lady to tell.

(*The curtain of the fairy chamber opens*

slightly, and TINK, *who has doubtless been eavesdropping, tinkles a laugh of scorn.*)

PETER (*badgered*). I suppose she means that she wants to be my mother.

(TINK's *comment is 'You silly ass.'*)

WENDY (*who has picked up some of the fairy words*). I almost agree with her!

(*The arrival of the boys in their nightgowns turns* WENDY's *mind to practical matters, for the children have to be arranged in line and passed or not passed for cleanliness.* SLIGHTLY *is the worst. At last we see how they sleep, for in a babel the great bed which stands on end by day against the wall is unloosed from custody and lowered to the floor. Though large, it is a tight fit for so many boys, and* WENDY *has made a rule that there is to be no turning round until one gives the signal, when all turn at once.*

FIRST TWIN *is the best dancer and performs mightily on the bed and in it and out of it and over it to an accompaniment of pillow fights by the less agile; and then there is a rush at* WENDY.)

NIBS. Now the story you promised to tell us as soon as we were in bed!

WENDY (*severely*). As far as I can see you are not in bed yet.

(*They scramble into the bed, and the effect is as of a boxful of sardines.*)

WENDY (*drawing up her stool*). Well, there was once a gentleman—

CURLY. I wish he had been a lady.

NIBS. I wish he had been a white rat.

WENDY. Quiet! There was a lady also. The gentleman's name was Mr. Darling and the lady's name was Mrs. Darling—

JOHN. I knew them!

MICHAEL (*who has been allowed to join the circle*). I think I knew them.

WENDY. They were married, you know; and what do you think they had?

NIBS. White rats?

WENDY. No, they had three descendants. White rats are descendants also. Almost everything is a descendant. Now these three children had a faithful nurse called Nana.

MICHAEL (*alas*). What a funny name!

WENDY. But Mr. Darling—(*faltering*) or was it Mrs. Darling?—was angry with her and chained her up in the yard; so all the children flew away. They flew away to the Never Land, where the lost boys are.

CURLY. I just thought they did; I don't know how it is, but I just thought they did.

TOOTLES. Oh, Wendy, was one of the lost boys called Tootles?

WENDY. Yes, he was.

TOOTLES (*dazzled*). Am I in a story? Nibs, I am in a story!

PETER (*who is by the fire making Pan's pipes with his knife, and is determined that* WENDY *shall have fair play, however beastly a story he may think it*). A little less noise there.

WENDY (*melting over the beauty of her present performance, but without any real qualms*). Now I want you to consider the feelings of the unhappy parents with all their children flown away. Think, oh think, of the empty beds. (*The heartless ones think of them with glee.*)

FIRST TWIN (*cheerfully*). It's awfully sad.

WENDY. But our heroine knew that her mother would always leave the window open for her progeny to fly back by; so they stayed away for years and had a lovely time.

(PETER *is interested at last.*)

FIRST TWIN. Did they ever go back?

WENDY (*comfortably*). Let us now take a peep into the future. Years have rolled by, and who is this elegant lady of uncertain age alighting at London station?

(*The tension is unbearable.*)

NIBS. Oh, Wendy, who is she?

WENDY (*swelling*). Can it be—yes—no—yes, it is the fair Wendy!

TOOTLES. I am glad.

WENDY. Who are the two noble portly figures accompanying her? Can they be John and Michael? They are. (*Pride of* MICHAEL.) 'See, dear brothers,' says Wendy, pointing upward, 'there is the window standing open.' So up they flew to their loving parents, and pen cannot inscribe the happy scene over which we draw a veil. (*Her triumph is spoilt by a groan from* PETER *and she hurries to him.*) Peter, what is it? (*Thinking he is ill, and looking lower than his chest*) Where is it?

PETER. It isn't that kind of pain. Wendy, you are wrong about mothers. I thought like you about the window, so I stayed away for moons and moons, and then I flew back, but the window was barred, for my mother had forgotten all about me and there was another little boy sleeping in my bed.

(*This is a general damper.*)

JOHN. Wendy, let us go back!

WENDY. Are you sure mothers are like that?

PETER. Yes.

WENDY. John, Michael! (*She clasps them to her.*)

FIRST TWIN (*alarmed*). You are not to leave us, Wendy?

WENDY. I must.

NIBS. Not to-night?

WENDY. At once. Perhaps mother is in half-mourning by this time! Peter, will you make the necessary arrangements?

(*She asks it in the steely tones women adopt when they are prepared secretly for opposition.*)

PETER (*coolly*). If you wish it.

(*He ascends his tree to give the redskins their instructions. The lost boys gather threateningly round* WENDY.)

CURLY. We won't let you go!

WENDY (*with one of those inspirations women have, in an emergency, to make use of some male who need otherwise have no hope*). Tootles, I appeal to you.

TOOTLES (*leaping to his death if necessary*). I am just Tootles and nobody minds me, but the first who does not behave to Wendy I will blood him severely. (PETER *returns.*)

PETER (*with awful serenity*). Wendy, I told the braves to guide you through the wood as flying tires you so. Then Tinker Bell will take you across the sea. (*A shrill tinkle from the boudoir probably means 'and drop her into it.'*)

NIBS (*fingering the curtain which he is not allowed to open*). Tink, you are to get up and take Wendy on a journey. (*Star-eyed*) She says she won't!

PETER (*taking a step toward that chamber*). If you don't get up, Tink, and dress at once— She is getting up!

WENDY (*quivering now that the time to depart has*

come). Dear ones, if you will all come with me I feel almost sure I can get my father and mother to adopt you.

(*There is joy at this, not that they want parents, but novelty is their religion.*)

NIBS. But won't they think us rather a handful?

WENDY (*a swift reckoner*). Oh no, it will only mean having a few beds in the drawing-room; they can be hidden behind screens on first Thursdays.

(*Everything depends on* PETER.)

OMNES. Peter, may we go?

PETER (*carelessly through the pipes to which he is giving a finishing touch*). All right.

(*They scurry off to dress for the adventure.*)

WENDY (*insinuatingly*). Get your clothes, Peter.

PETER (*skipping about and playing fairy music on his pipes, the only music he knows*). I am not going with you, Wendy.

WENDY. Yes, Peter!

PETER. No.

(*The lost ones run back gaily, each carrying a stick with a bundle on the end of it.*)

WENDY. Peter isn't coming!

(*All the faces go blank.*)

JOHN (*even* JOHN). Peter not coming!

TOOTLES (*overthrown*). Why, Peter?

PETER (*his pipes more riotous than ever*). I just want always to be a little boy and to have fun.

(*There is a general fear that they are perhaps making the mistake of their lives.*)

Now then, no fuss, no blubbering. (*With dreadful cynicism*) I hope you will like your mothers! Are you ready, Tink! Then lead the way.

(TINK *darts up any tree, but she is the only one. The air above is suddenly rent with shrieks and the clash of steel. Though they cannot see, the boys know that* HOOK *and his crew are upon the Indians. Mouths open and remain open, all in mute appeal to* PETER. *He is the only boy on his feet now, a sword in his hand, the same he slew Barbicue with; and in his eye is the lust of battle.*

We can watch the carnage that is invisible to the children. HOOK *has basely broken the two laws of Indian warfare, which are that the redskins should attack first, and that it should be at dawn. They have known the pirate whereabouts since, early in the night, one of* SMEE'S *fingers crackled. The brushwood has closed behind their scouts as silently as the sand on the mole; for hours they have imitated the lonely call of the coyote; no stratagem has been overlooked, but alas, they have trusted to the paleface's honour to await an attack at dawn, when his courage is known to be at the lowest ebb.* HOOK *falls upon them pell-mell, and one cannot*

withhold a reluctant admiration for the wit that conceived so subtle a scheme and the fell genius with which it is carried out. If the braves would rise quickly they might still have time to scalp, but this they are forbidden to do by the traditions of their race, for it is written that they must never express surprise in the presence of the pale-face. For a brief space they remain recumbent, not a muscle moving, as if the foe were here by invitation. Thus perish the flower of the Piccaninnies, though not unavenged, for with LEAN WOLF *fall* ALF MASON *and* CANARY ROBB, *while other pirates to bite dust are* BLACK GILMOUR *and* ALAN HERB, *that same* HERB *who is still remembered at Manaos for playing skittles with the mate of the* Switch *for each other's heads.* CHAY TURLEY, *who laughed with the wrong side of his mouth (having no other), is tomahawked by* PANTHER, *who eventually cuts a way through the shambles with* TIGER LILY *and a remnant of the tribe.*

This onslaught passes and is gone like a fierce wind. The victors wipe their cutlasses, and squint, ferret-eyed, at their leader. He remains, as ever, aloof in spirit and in substance. He signs to them to descend the trees, for he is convinced that PAN *is down there, and though he has smoked the bees it is the honey he wants.*

There is something in PETER *that at all times goads this extraordinary man to frenzy; it is the boy's cockiness, which disturbs* HOOK *like an insect. If you have seen a lion in a cage futilely pursuing a sparrow you will know what is meant. The pirates try to do their captain's bidding, but the apertures prove to be not wide enough for them; he cannot even ram them down with a pole. He steals to the mouth of a tree and listens.*)

PETER (*prematurely*). All is over!

WENDY. But who has won?

PETER. Hst! If the Indians have won they will beat the tom-tom; it is always their signal of victory.

(HOOK *licks his lips at this and signs to* SMEE, *who is sitting on it, to hold up the tom-tom. He beats upon it with his claw, and listens for results.*)

TOOTLES. The tom-tom!

PETER (*sheathing his sword*). An Indian victory!

(*The cheers from below are music to the black hearts above.*)

You are quite safe now, Wendy. Boys, good-bye. (*He resumes his pipes.*)

WENDY. Peter, you will remember about changing your flannels, won't you?

PETER. Oh, all right!

WENDY. And this is your medicine.

(She puts something into a shell and leaves it on a ledge between two of the trees. It is only water, but she measures it out in drops.)

PETER. I won't forget.

WENDY. Peter, what are you to me?

PETER (*through the pipes*). Your son, Wendy.

WENDY. Oh, good-bye!

(The travellers start upon their journey, little witting that HOOK *has issued his silent orders: a man to the mouth of each tree, and a row of men between the trees and the little house. As the children squeeze up they are plucked from their trees, trussed, thrown like bales of cotton from one pirate to another, and so piled up in the little house. The only one treated differently is* WENDY, *whom* HOOK *escorts to the house on his arm with hateful politeness. He signs to his dogs to be gone, and they depart through the wood, carrying the little house with its strange merchandise and singing their ribald song. The chimney of the little house emits a jet of smoke fitfully, as if not sure what it ought to do just now.*

HOOK *and* PETER *are now, as it were, alone on the island. Below,* PETER *is on the bed, asleep, no weapon near him; above,* HOOK, *armed to the teeth, is searching noiselessly for some tree down which the nastiness of him can descend.*

Don't be too much alarmed by this; it is precisely the situation PETER *would have chosen; indeed if the whole thing were pretend—. One of his arms droops over the edge of the bed, a leg is arched, and the mouth is not so tightly closed that we cannot see the little pearls. He is dreaming, and in his dreams he is always in pursuit of a boy who was never here, nor anywhere: the only boy who could beat him.*

HOOK *finds the tree. It is the one set apart for* SLIGHTLY *who being addicted when hot to the drinking of water has swelled in consequence and surreptitiously scooped his tree for easier descent and egress. Down this the pirate wriggles a passage. In the aperture below his face emerges and goes green as he glares at the sleeping child. Does no feeling of compassion disturb his sombre breast? The man is not wholly evil: he has a* Thesaurus *in his cabin, and is no mean performer on the flute. What really warps him is a presentiment that he is about to fail. This is not unconnected with a beatific smile on the face of the sleeper, whom he cannot reach owing to being stuck at the foot of the tree. He, however, sees the medicine shell within easy reach, and to* WENDY'S *draught he adds from a bottle five drops of poison distilled when he was weeping from the red in his eye. The*

expression on PETER'S *face merely implies that something heavenly is going on.* HOOK *worms his ways upwards, and winding his cloak around him, as if to conceal his person from the night of which he is the blackest part, he stalks moodily toward the lagoon.*

A dot of light flashes past him and darts down the nearest tree, looking for PETER, *only for* PETER, *quite indifferent about the others when she finds him safe.*)

PETER (*stirring*). Who is that? (TINK *has to tell her tale, in one long ungrammatical sentence.*) The redskins were defeated? Wendy and the boys captured by the pirates! I'll rescue her, I'll rescue her! (*He leaps first at his dagger, and then at his grindstone, to sharpen it.* TINK *alights near the shell, and rings out a warning cry.*) Oh, that is just my medicine. Poisoned? Who could have poisoned it? I promised Wendy to take it, and I will as soon as I have sharpened my dagger. (TINK, *who sees its red colour and remembers the red in the pirate's eye, nobly swallows the draught as* PETER'S *hand is reaching for it.*) Why, Tink, you have drunk my medicine! (*She flutters strangely about the room, answering him now in a very thin tinkle.*) It was poisoned and you drank it to save my life! Tink, dear Tink, are you dying? (*He has never called her dear Tink before, and for a moment she is gay; she*

alights on his shoulder, gives his chin a loving bite, whispers 'You silly ass,' and falls on her tiny bed. The boudoir, which is lit by her, flickers ominously. He is on his knees by the opening.)

Her light is growing faint, and if it goes out, that means she is dead! Her voice is so low I can scarcely tell what she is saying. She says—she says she thinks she could get well again if children believed in fairies! (*He rises and throws out his arms he knows not to whom, perhaps to the boys and girls of whom he is not one.*) Do you believe in fairies? Say quick that you believe! If you believe, clap your hands! (*Many clap, some don't, a few hiss. Then perhaps there is a rush of Nanas to the nurseries to see what on earth is happening. But* TINK *is saved.*) Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you! And now to rescue Wendy!

(TINK *is already as merry and impudent as a grig, with not a thought for those who have saved her.* PETER *ascends his tree as if he were shot up it. What he is feeling is 'Hook or me this time!' He is frightfully happy. He soon hits the trail, for the smoke from the little house has lingered here and there to guide him. He takes wing.*)

ACT V

Scene 1

THE PIRATE SHIP

The stage directions for the opening of this scene are as follows:—1 Circuit Amber checked to 80. Battens, all Amber checked, 3 ship's lanterns alight, Arcs: prompt perch 1. Open dark Amber flooding back, O.P. perch open dark Amber flooding upper deck. Arc on tall steps at back of cabin to flood back cloth. Open dark Amber. Warning for slide. Plank ready. Call Hook.

In the strange light thus described we see what is happening on the deck of the *Jolly Roger,* which is flying the skull and crossbones and lies low in the water. There is no need to call Hook, for he is here already, and indeed there is not a pirate aboard who would dare to call him. Most of them are at present carousing in the bowels of the vessel, but on the poop Mullins is visible, in the only great-coat on the ship, raking with his glass the monstrous rocks within which the lagoon is cooped. Such a look-out is supererogatory, for the pirate craft floats immune in the horror of her name.

From Hook's cabin at the back Starkey appears and leans over the bulwark, silently surveying the sullen waters. He is bare-headed and is perhaps thinking with bitterness of his hat, which he sometimes sees still drifting past him with the Never bird sitting on it. The black pirate is asleep on deck, yet even in his dreams rolling mechanically out of the way when Hook draws near. The only sound to be heard is made by Smee at his sewing-machine, which lends a touch of domesticity to the night.

Hook is now leaning against the mast, now prowling the deck, the double cigar in his mouth. With Peter surely at last removed from his path we, who know how vain a tabernacle is man, would not be surprised to find him bellied out by the winds of his success, but it is not so; he is still uneasy, looking long and meaninglessly at familiar objects, such as the ship's bell or the Long Tom, like one who may shortly be a stranger to them. It is as if Pan's terrible oath 'Hook or me this time!' had already boarded the ship.

HOOK (*communing with his ego*). How still the night is; nothing sounds alive. Now is the hour when children in their homes are a-bed; their lips bright-browned with the good-night chocolate, and their tongues drowsily searching for belated crumbs housed insecurely on their shining cheeks. Compare

with them the children on this boat about to walk the plank. Split my infinitives, but 'tis my hour of triumph! (*Clinging to this fair prospect he dances a few jubilant steps, but they fall below his usual form.*) And yet some disky spirit compels me now to make my dying speech, lest when dying there may be no time for it. All mortals envy me, yet better perhaps for Hook to have had less ambition! O fame, fame, thou glittering bauble, what if the very— (SMEE, *engrossed in his labours at the sewing-machine, tears a piece of calico with a rending sound which makes the Solitary think for a moment that the untoward has happened to his garments.*) No little children love me. I am told they play at Peter Pan, and that the strongest always chooses to be Peter. They would rather be a Twin than Hook; they force the baby to be Hook. The baby! that is where the canker gnaws. (*He contemplates his industrious boatswain.*) 'Tis said they find Smee lovable. But an hour agone I found him letting the youngest of them try on his spectacles. Pathetic Smee, the Nonconformist pirate, a happy smile upon his face because he thinks they fear him! How can I break it to him that they think him lovable? No, bi-carbonate of Soda, no, not even— (*Another rending of the calico disturbs him, and he has a private consultation with* STARKEY, *who turns him round and evidently assures him that all is well. The perora-*

tion of his speech is nevertheless for ever lost, as eight bells strikes and his crew pour forth in bacchanalian orgy. From the poop he watches their dance till it frets him beyond bearing.) Quiet, you dogs, or I'll cast anchor in you! (*He descends to a barrel on which there are playing-cards, and his crew stand waiting, as ever, like whipped curs.*) Are all the prisoners chained, so that they can't fly away?

JUKES. Ay, ay, Captain.

HOOK. Then hoist them up.

STARKEY (*raising the door of the hold*). Tumble up, you ungentlemanly lubbers.

(*The terrified boys are prodded up and tossed about the deck.* HOOK *seems to have forgotten them; he is sitting by the barrel with his cards.*)

HOOK (*suddenly*). So! Now then, you bullies, six of you walk the plank to-night, but I have room for two cabin-boys. Which of you is it to be? (*He returns to his cards.*)

TOOTLES (*hoping to soothe him by putting the blame on the only person, vaguely remembered, who is always willing to act as a buffer*). You see, sir, I don't think my mother would like me to be a pirate. Would your mother like you to be a pirate, Slightly?

SLIGHTLY (*implying that otherwise it would be a pleasure to him to oblige.*) I don't think so. Twin, would your mother like—

HOOK. Stow this gab. (*To* JOHN) You boy, you

look as if you had a little pluck in you. Didst never want to be a pirate, my hearty?

JOHN (*dazzled by being singled out*). When I was at school I—what do you think, Michael?

MICHAEL (*stepping into prominence*). What would you call me if I joined?

HOOK. Blackbeard Joe.

MICHAEL. John, what do you think?

JOHN. Stop, should we still be respectful subjects of King George?

HOOK. You would have to swear 'Down with King George.'

JOHN (*grandly*). Then I refuse!

MICHAEL. And I refuse.

HOOK. That seals your doom. Bring up their mother.

(WENDY *is driven up from the hold and thrown to him. She sees at the first glance that the deck has not been scrubbed for years.*)

So, my beauty, you are to see your children walk the plank.

WENDY (*with noble calmness*). Are they to die?

HOOK. They are. Silence all, for a mother's last words to her children.

WENDY. These are my last words. Dear boys, I feel that I have a message to you from your real mothers, and it is this, 'We hope our sons will die like English gentlemen.'

(*The boys go on fire.*)

TOOTLES. I am going to do what my mother hopes. What are you to do, Twin?

FIRST TWIN. What my mother hopes. John, what are—

HOOK. Tie her up! Get the plank ready.

(WENDY *is roped to the mast; but no one regards her, for all eyes are fixed upon the plank now protruding from the poop over the ship's side. A great change, however, occurs in the time* HOOK *takes to raise his claw and point to this deadly engine. No one is now looking at the plank: for the tick, tick of the crocodile is heard. Yet it is not to bear on the crocodile that all eyes slew round, it is that they may bear on* HOOK. *Otherwise prisoners and captors are equally inert, like actors in some play who have found themselves 'on' in a scene in which they are not personally concerned. Even the iron claw hangs inactive, as if aware that the crocodile is not coming for it. Affection for their captain, now cowering from view, is not what has given* HOOK *his dominance over the crew, but as the menacing sound draws nearer they close their eyes respectfully.*

There is no crocodile. It is PETER, *who has been circling the pirate ship, ticking as he flies far more superbly than any clock. He drops into*

the water and climbs aboard, warning the captives with upraised finger (but still ticking) not for the moment to give audible expression to their natural admiration. Only one pirate sees him, WHIBBLES *of the eye patch, who comes up from below.* JOHN *claps a hand on* WHIBBLES'S *mouth to stifle the groan; four boys hold him to prevent the thud;* PETER *delivers the blow, and the carrion is thrown overboard. 'One!' says* SLIGHTLY, *beginning to count.*

STARKEY *is the first pirate to open his eyes. The ship seems to him to be precisely as when he closed them. He cannot interpret the sparkle that has come into the faces of the captives, who are cleverly pretending to be as afraid as ever. He little knows that the door of the dark cabin has just closed on one more boy. Indeed it is for* HOOK *alone he looks, and he is a little surprised to see him.*)

STARKEY (*hoarsely*). It is gone, Captain! There is not a sound.

(*The tenement that is* HOOK *heaves tumultuously and he is himself again.*)

HOOK (*now convinced that some fair spirit watches over him*). Then here is to Johnny Plank—

Avast, belay, the English brig
We took and quickly sank,

And for a warning to the crew
We made them walk the plank!

(*As he sings he capers detestably along an imaginary plank and his copy-cats do likewise, joining in the chorus.*)

Yo ho, yo ho, the frisky cat,
You walks along it so,
Till it goes down and you goes down
To tooral looral lo!

(*The brave children try to stem this monstrous torrent by breaking into the National Anthem.*)

STARKEY (*paling*). I don't like it, messmates!

HOOK. Stow that, Starkey. Do you boys want a touch of the cat before you walk the plank? (*He is more pitiless than ever now that he believes he has a charmed life.*) Fetch the cat, Jukes; it is in the cabin.

JUKES. Ay, ay, sir. (*It is one of his commonest remarks, and it is only recorded now because he never makes another. The stage direction 'Exit* JUKES' *has in this case a special significance. But only the children know that some one is awaiting this unfortunate in the cabin, and* HOOK *tramples them down as he resumes his ditty:*)

Yo ho, yo ho, the scratching cat
Its tails are nine you know,

And when they're writ upon your back,
You're fit to—

(*The last words will ever remain a matter of conjecture, for from the dark cabin comes a curdling screech which wails through the ship and dies away. It is followed by a sound, almost more eerie in the circumstances, that can only be likened to the crowing of a cock.*)

HOOK. What was that?

SLIGHTLY (*solemnly*). Two!

(CECCO *swings into the cabin, and in a moment returns, livid.*)

HOOK (*with an effort*). What is the matter with Bill Jukes, you dog?

CECCO. The matter with him is he is dead—stabbed.

PIRATES. Bill Jukes dead!

CECCO. The cabin is as black as a pit, but there is something terrible in there: the thing you heard a-crowing.

HOOK (*slowly*). Cecco, go back and fetch me out that doodle-doo.

CECCO (*unstrung*). No, Captain, no. (*He supplicates on his knees, but his master advances on him implacably.*)

HOOK (*in his most syrupy voice*). Did you say you would go, Cecco?

(CECCO *goes. All listen. There is one screech, one crow.*)

SLIGHTLY (*as if he were a bell tolling*). Three!

HOOK. 'Sdeath and oddsfish, who is to bring me out that doodle-doo?

(*No one steps forward.*)

STARKEY (*injudiciously*). Wait till Cecco comes out.

(*The black looks of some others encourage him.*)

HOOK. I think I heard you volunteer, Starkey.

STARKEY (*emphatically*). No, by thunder!

HOOK (*in that syrupy voice which might be more engaging when accompanied by his flute.*) My hook thinks you did. I wonder if it would not be advisable, Starkey, to humour the hook?

STARKEY. I'll swing before I go in there.

HOOK (*gleaming*). Is it mutiny? Starkey is ringleader. Shake hands, Starkey.

(STARKEY *recoils from the claw. It follows him till he leaps overboard.*)

Did any other gentleman say mutiny?

(*They indicate that they did not even know the late* STARKEY.)

SLIGHTLY. Four!

HOOK. I will bring out that doodle-doo myself.

(*He raises a blunderbuss but casts it from him with a menacing gesture which means that he*

has more faith in the claw. With a lighted lantern in his hand he enters the cabin. Not a sound is to be heard now on the ship, unless it be SLIGHTLY *wetting his lips to say 'Five.'* HOOK *staggers out.*)

HOOK (*unsteadily*). Something blew out the light.

MULLINS (*with dark meaning*). Some—thing?

NOODLER. What of Cecco?

HOOK. He is as dead as Jukes.

(*They are superstitious like all sailors, and* MULLINS *has planted a dire conception in their minds.*)

COOKSON. They do say as the surest sign a ship's accurst is when there is one aboard more than can be accounted for.

NOODLER. I've heard he allus boards the pirate craft at last. (*With dreadful significance*) Has he a tail, Captain?

MULLINS. They say that when he comes it is in the likeness of the wickedest man aboard.

COOKSON (*clinching it*). Has he a hook, Captain?

(*Knives and pistols come to hand, and there is a general cry 'The ship is doomed!' But it is not his dogs that can frighten* JAS HOOK. *Hearing something like a cheer from the boys he wheels round, and his face brings them to their knees.*)

HOOK. So you like it, do you! By Caius and Balbus, bullies, here is a notion: open the cabin door and drive them in. Let them fight the doodle-doo for their lives. If they kill him we are so much the better; if he kills them we are none the worse.

(*This masterly stroke restores their confidence; and the boys, affecting fear, are driven into the cabin. Desperadoes though the pirates are, some of them have been boys themselves, and all turn their backs to the cabin and listen, with arms outstretched to it as if to ward off the horrors that are being enacted there.*

Relieved by PETER *of their manacles, and armed with such weapons as they can lay their hands on, the boys steal out softly as snowflakes, and under their captain's hushed order find hiding-places on the poop. He releases* WENDY; *and now it would be easy for them all to fly away, but it is to be* HOOK *or him this time. He signs to her to join the others, and with awful grimness folding her cloak around him, the hood over his head, he takes her place by the mast, and crows.*)

MULLINS. The doodle-doo has killed them all!

SEVERAL. The ship's bewitched.

(*They are snapping at* HOOK *again.*)

HOOK. I've thought it out, lads; there is a Jonah aboard.

SEVERAL (*advancing upon him*). Ay, a man with a hook.

(*If he were to withdraw one step their knives would be in him, but he does not flinch.*)

HOOK (*temporising*). No, lads, no, it is the girl. Never was luck on a pirate ship wi' a woman aboard. We'll right the ship when she has gone.

MULLINS (*lowering his cutlass*). It's worth trying.

HOOK. Throw the girl overboard.

MULLINS (*jeering*). There is none can save you now, missy.

PETER. There is one.

MULLINS. Who is that?

PETER (*casting off the cloak*). Peter Pan, the avenger!

(*He continues standing there to let the effect sink in.*)

HOOK (*throwing out a suggestion*). Cleave him to the brisket.

(*But he has a sinking that this boy has no brisket.*)

NOODLER. The ship's accurst!

PETER. Down, boys, and at them!

(*The boys leap from their concealment and the clash of arms resounds through the vessel. Man to man the pirates are the stronger, but they are unnerved by the suddenness of the onslaught*

and they scatter, thus enabling their opponents to hunt in couples and choose their quarry. Some are hurled into the lagoon; others are dragged from dark recesses. There is no boy whose weapon is not reeking save SLIGHTLY, *who runs about with a lantern, counting, ever counting.*)

WENDY (*meeting* MICHAEL *in a moment's lull*). Oh, Michael, stay with me, protect me!

MICHAEL (*reeling*). Wendy, I've killed a pirate!

WENDY. It's awful, awful.

MICHAEL. No, it isn't, I like it, I like it.

(*He casts himself into the group of boys who are encircling* HOOK. *Again and again they close upon him and again and again he hews a clear space.*)

HOOK. Back, back, you mice. It's Hook; do you like him? (*He lifts up* MICHAEL *with his claw and uses him as a buckler. A terrible voice breaks in.*)

PETER. Put up your swords, boys. This man is mine.

(HOOK *shakes* MICHAEL *off his claw as if he were a drop of water, and these two antagonists face each other for their final bout. They measure swords at arms' length, make a sweeping motion with them, and bringing the points to the deck rest their hands upon the hilts.*)

HOOK (*with curling lip*). So, Pan, this is all your doing!

PETER. Ay, Jas Hook, it is all my doing.

HOOK. Proud and insolent youth, prepare to meet thy doom.

PETER. Dark and sinister man, have at thee.

(*Some say that he had to ask* TOOTLES *whether the word was sinister or canister.*

HOOK *or* PETER *this time! They fall to without another word.* PETER *is a rare swordsman, and parries with dazzling rapidity, sometimes before the other can make his stroke.* HOOK, *if not quite so nimble in wrist play, has the advantage of a yard or two in reach, but though they close he cannot give the quietus with his claw, which seems to find nothing to tear at. He does not, especially in the most heated moments, quite see* PETER, *who to his eyes, now blurred or opened clearly for the first time, is less like a boy than a mote of dust dancing in the sun. By some impalpable stroke* HOOK'S *sword is whipped from his grasp, and when he stoops to raise it a little foot is on its blade. There is no deep gash on* HOOK, *but he is suffering torment as from innumerable jags.*)

BOYS (*exulting*). Now, Peter, now!

(PETER *raises the sword by its blade, and with an inclination of the head that is perhaps slightly overdone, presents the hilt to his enemy.*)

HOOK. 'Tis some fiend fighting me! Pan, who and what art thou?

(*The children listen eagerly for the answer, none quite so eagerly as* WENDY.)

PETER (*at a venture*). I'm youth, I'm joy, I'm a little bird that has broken out of the egg.

HOOK. To't again!

(*He has now a damp feeling that this boy is the weapon which is to strike him from the lists of man; but the grandeur of his mind still holds and, true to the traditions of his flag, he fights on like a human flail.* PETERS *flutters round and through and over these gyrations as if the wind of them blew him out of the danger zone, and again and again he darts in and jags.*)

HOOK (*stung to madness*). I'll fire the powder magazine. (*He disappears they know not where.*)

CHILDREN. Peter, save us!

(PETER, *alas, goes the wrong way and* HOOK *returns.*)

HOOK (*sitting on the hold with gloomy satisfaction*). In two minutes the ship will be blown to pieces.

(*They cast themselves before him in entreaty.*)

CHILDREN. Mercy, mercy!

HOOK. Back, you pewling spawn. I'll show you now the road to dusty death. A holocaust of children, there is something grand in the idea!

(PETER *appears with a smoking bomb in his hand and tosses it overboard.* HOOK *has not*

really had much hope, and he rushes at his other persecutors with his head down like some exasperated bull in the ring; but with bantering cries they easily elude him by flying among the rigging.

Where is PETER? *The incredible boy has apparently forgotten the recent doings, and is sitting on a barrel playing upon his pipes. This may surprise others but does not surprise* HOOK. *Lifting a blunderbus he strikes forlornly not at the boy but at the barrel, which is hurled across the deck.* PETER *remains sitting in the air still playing upon his pipes. At this sight the great heart of* HOOK *breaks. That not wholly unheroic figure climbs the bulwarks murmuring* 'Floreat Etona,' *and prostrates himself into the water, where the crocodile is waiting for him open-mouthed.* HOOK *knows the purpose of this yawning cavity, but after what he has gone through he enters it like one greeting a friend.*

The curtain rises to show PETER *a very Napoleon on his ship. It must not rise again lest we see him on the poop in* HOOK'S *hat and cigars, and with a small iron claw.*)

Scene 2

THE NURSERY AND THE TREE-TOPS

The old nursery appears again with everything just as it was at the beginning of the play, except that the kennel has gone and that the window is standing open. So Peter was wrong about mothers; indeed there is no subject on which he is so likely to be wrong.

Mrs. Darling is asleep on a chair near the window, her eyes tired with searching the heavens. Nana is stretched out listless on the floor. She is the cynical one, and though custom has made her hang the children's night things on the fire-guard for an airing, she surveys them not hopefully but with some self-contempt.

MRS. DARLING (*starting up as if we had whispered to her that her brats are coming back*). Wendy, John, Michael! (NANA *lifts a sympathetic paw to the poor soul's lap.*) I see you have put their night things out again, Nana! It touches my heart to watch you do that night after night. But they will never come back.

(*In trouble the difference of station can be completely ignored, and it is not strange to see these two using the same handkerchief. Enter* LIZA,

LIBRARY ST. MARY'S COLLEGE

who in the gentleness with which the house has been run of late is perhaps a little more masterful than of yore.)

LIZA (*feeling herself degraded by the announcement*). Nana's dinner is served.

(NANA, *who quite understands what are* LIZA'S *feelings, departs for the dining-room with our exasperating leisureliness, instead of running, as we would all do if we followed our instincts.*)

LIZA. To think I have a master as have changed places with his dog!

MRS. DARLING (*gently*). Out of remorse, Liza.

LIZA (*surely exaggerating*). I am a married woman myself. I don't think it's respectable to go to his office in a kennel, with the street boys running alongside cheering. (*Even this does not rouse her mistress, which may have been the honourable intention.*) There, that is the cab fetching him back! (*Amid interested cheers from the street the kennel is conveyed to its old place by a cabby and friend, and* MR. DARLING *scrambles out of it in his office clothes.*)

MR. DARLING (*giving her his hat loftily*). If you will be so good, Liza. (*The cheering is resumed.*) It is very gratifying!

LIZA (*contemptuous*). Lot of little boys.

MR. DARLING (*with the new sweetness of one who has sworn never to lose his temper again*). There were several adults to-day.

(*She goes off scornfully with the hat and the two men, but he has not a word of reproach for her. It ought to melt us when we see how humbly grateful he is for a kiss from his wife, so much more than he feels he deserves. One may think he is wrong to exchange into the kennel, but sorrow has taught him that he is the kind of man who whatever he does contritely he must do to excess; otherwise he soon abandons doing it.*)

MRS. DARLING (*who has known this for quite a long time*). What sort of a day have you had, George?

(*He is sitting on the floor by the kennel.*)

MR. DARLING. There were never less than a hundred running round the cab cheering, and when we passed the Stock Exchange the members came out and waved.

(*He is exultant but uncertain of himself, and with a word she could dispirit him utterly.*)

MRS. DARLING (*bravely*). I am so proud, George.

MR. DARLING (*commendation from the dearest quarter ever going to his head*). I have been put on a picture postcard, dear.

MRS. DARLING (*nobly*). Never!

MR. DARLING (*thoughtlessly*). Ah, Mary, we should not be such celebrities if the children hadn't flown away.

MRS. DARLING (*startled*). George, you are sure you are not enjoying it?

MR. DARLING (*anxiously*). Enjoying it! See my punishment: living in a kennel.

MRS. DARLING. Forgive me, dear one.

MR. DARLING. It is I who need forgiveness, always I, never you. And now I feel drowsy. (*He retires into the kennel.*) Won't you play me to sleep on the nursery piano? And shut that window, Mary dearest; I feel a draught.

MRS. DARLING. Oh, George, never ask me to do that. The window must always be left open for them, always, always.

(*She goes into the day nursery, from which we presently hear her playing the sad song of Margaret. She little knows that her last remark has been overheard by a boy crouching at the window. He steals into the room accompanied by a ball of light.*)

PETER. Tink, where are you? Quick, close the window. (*It closes.*) Bar it. (*The bar slams down.*) Now when Wendy comes she will think her mother has barred her out, and she will have to come back to me! (TINKER BELL *sulks.*) Now, Tink, you and I must go out by the door. (*Doors, however, are confusing things to those who are used to windows, and he is puzzled when he finds that this one does not open on to the firmament. He tries the other, and sees the piano player.*) It is Wendy's mother! (TINK *pops on to his shoulder and they peep together.*) She is

a pretty lady, but not so pretty as my mother. (*This is a pure guess.*) She is making the box say 'Come home, Wendy.' You will never see Wendy again, lady, for the window is barred! (*He flutters about the room joyously like a bird, but has to return to that door.*) She has laid her head down on the box. There are two wet things sitting on her eyes. As soon as they go away another two come and sit on her eyes. (*She is heard moaning* 'WENDY, WENDY, WENDY.') She wants me to unbar the window. I won't! She is awfully fond of Wendy. I am fond of her too. We can't both have her, lady! (*A funny feeling comes over him.*) Come on, Tink; we don't want any silly mothers.

(*He opens the window and they fly out.*

It is thus that the truants find entrance easy when they alight on the sill, JOHN *to his credit having the tired* MICHAEL *on his shoulders. They have nothing else to their credit; no compunction for what they have done, not the tiniest fear that any just person may be awaiting them with a stick. The youngest is in a daze, but the two others are shining virtuously like holy people who are about to give two other people a treat.*)

MICHAEL (*looking about him*). I think I have been here before.

JOHN. It's your home, you stupid.

WENDY. There is your old bed, Michael.

MICHAEL. I had nearly forgotten.

JOHN. I say, the kennel!

WENDY. Perhaps Nana is in it.

JOHN (*peering*). There is a man asleep in it.

WENDY (*remembering him by the bald patch*). It's father!

JOHN. So it is!

MICHAEL. Let me see father. (*Disappointed*) He is not as big as the pirate I killed.

JOHN (*perplexed*). Wendy, surely father didn't use to sleep in the kennel?

WENDY (*with misgivings*). Perhaps we don't remember the old life as well as we thought we did.

JOHN (*chilled*). It is very careless of mother not to be here when we come back.

(*The piano is heard again.*)

WENDY. H'sh! (*She goes to the door and peeps.*) That is her playing! (*They all have a peep.*)

MICHAEL. Who is that lady?

JOHN. H'sh! It's mother.

MICHAEL. Then are you not really our mother, Wendy?

WENDY (*with conviction*). Oh dear, it is quite time to be back!

JOHN. Let us creep in and put our hands over her eyes.

WENDY (*more considerate*). No, let us break it to her gently.

(*She slips between the sheets of her bed; and the others, seeing the idea at once, get into their beds. Then when the music stops they cover their heads. There are now three distinct bumps in the beds.* MRS. DARLING *sees the bumps as soon as she comes in, but she does not believe she sees them.*)

MRS. DARLING. I see them in their beds so often in my dreams that I seem still to see them when I am awake! I'll not look again. (*She sits down and turns away her face from the bumps, though of course they are still reflected in her mind.*) So often their silver voices call me, my little children whom I'll see no more.

(*Silver voices is a good one, especially about* JOHN*; but the heads pop up.*)

WENDY (*perhaps rather silvery*). Mother!

MRS. DARLING (*without moving*). That is Wendy.

JOHN (*quite gruff*). Mother!

MRS. DARLING. Now it is John.

MICHAEL (*no better than a squeak*). Mother!

MRS. DARLING. Now Michael. And when they call I stretch out my arms to them, but they never come, they never come!

(*This time, however, they come, and there is joy once more in the* DARLING *household. The little boy who is crouching at the window sees the joke of the bumps in the beds, but cannot understand what all the rest of the fuss is about.*

The scene changes from the inside of the house to the outside, and we see MR. DARLING *romping in at the door, with the lost boys hanging gaily to his coat-tails. So we may conclude that* WENDY *has told them to wait outside until she explains the situation to her mother, who has then sent* MR. DARLING *down to tell them that they are adopted. Of course they could have flown in by the window like a covey of birds, but they think it better fun to enter by a door. There is a moment's trouble about* SLIGHTLY, *who somehow gets shut out. Fortunately* LIZA *finds him.*)

LIZA. What is the matter, boy?

SLIGHTLY. They have all got a mother except me.

LIZA (*starting back*). Is your name Slightly?

SLIGHTLY. Yes'm.

LIZA. Then I am your mother.

SLIGHTLY. How do you know?

LIZA (*the good-natured creature*). I feel it in my bones.

(*They go into the house and there is none happier now than* SLIGHTLY, *unless it be* NANA *as she passes with the importance of a nurse who will never have another day off.* WENDY *looks out at the nursery window and sees a friend below, who is hovering in the air knocking off tall hats with his feet. The wearers don't see him. They*

are too old. You can't see PETER *if you are old. They think he is a draught at the corner.*)

WENDY. Peter!

PETER (*looking up casually*). Hullo, Wendy.

(*She flies down to him, to the horror of her mother, who rushes to the window.*)

WENDY (*making a last attempt*). You don't feel you would like to say anything to my parents, Peter, about a very sweet subject?

PETER. No, Wendy.

WENDY. About me, Peter?

PETER. No. (*He gets out his pipes, which she knows is a very bad sign. She appeals with her arms to* MRS. DARLING, *who is probably thinking that these children will all need to be tied to their beds at night.*)

MRS. DARLING (*from the window*). Peter, where are you? Let me adopt you too.

(*She is the loveliest age for a woman, but too old to see* PETER *clearly.*)

PETER. Would you send me to school?

MRS. DARLING (*obligingly*). Yes.

PETER. And then to an office?

MRS. DARLING. I suppose so.

PETER. Soon I should be a man?

MRS. DARLING. Very soon.

PETER (*passionately*). I don't want to go to school and learn solemn things. No one is going to catch

me, lady, and make me a man. I want always to be a little boy and to have fun.

(*So perhaps he thinks, but it is only his greatest pretend.*)

MRS. DARLING (*shivering every time* WENDY *pursues him in the air*). Where are you to live, Peter?

PETER. In the house we built for Wendy. The fairies are to put it high up among the tree-tops where they sleep at night.

WENDY (*rapturously*). To think of it!

MRS. DARLING. I thought all the fairies were dead.

WENDY (*almost reprovingly*). No indeed! Their mothers drop the babies into the Never birds' nests, all mixed up with the eggs, and the mauve fairies are boys and the white ones are girls, and there are some colours who don't know what they are. The row the children and the birds make at bath time is positively deafening.

PETER. I throw things at them.

WENDY. You will be rather lonely in the evenings, Peter.

PETER. I shall have Tink.

WENDY (*flying up to the window*). Mother, may I go?

MRS. DARLING (*gripping her for ever*). Certainly not. I have got you home again, and I mean to keep you.

WENDY. But he does so need a mother.

MRS. DARLING. So do you, my love.

PETER. Oh, all right.

MRS. DARLING (*magnanimously*). But, Peter, I shall let her go to you once a year for a week to do your spring cleaning.

(WENDY *revels in this, but* PETER, *who has no notion what a spring cleaning is, waves a rather careless thanks.*)

MRS. DARLING. Say good-night, Wendy.

WENDY. I couldn't go down just for a minute?

MRS. DARLING. No.

WENDY. Good-night, Peter!

PETER. Good-night, Wendy!

WENDY. Peter, you won't forget me, will you, before spring-cleaning time comes?

(*There is no answer, for he is already soaring high. For a moment after he is gone we still hear the pipes.* MRS. DARLING *closes and bars the window.*)

We are dreaming now of the Never Land a year later. It is bed-time on the island, and the blind goes up to the whispers of the lovely Never music. The blue haze that makes the wood below magical by day comes up to the tree-tops to sleep, and through it we see numberless nests all lit up, fairies and birds quarrelling for posession, others flying around just for the fun of the thing and perhaps making bets about

where the little house will appear to-night. It always comes and snuggles on some tree-top, but you can never be sure which; here it is again, you see John's hat first as up comes the house so softly that it knocks some gossips off their perch. When it has settled comfortably it lights up, and out come Peter and Wendy.

Wendy looks a little older, but Peter is just the same. She is cloaked for a journey, and a sad confession must be made about her; she flies so badly now that she has to use a broomstick.

WENDY (*who knows better this time than to be demonstrative at partings*). Well, good-bye, Peter; and remember not to bite your nails.

PETER. Good-bye, Wendy.

WENDY. I'll tell mother all about the spring cleaning and the house.

PETER (*who sometimes forgets that she has been here before.*) You do like the house?

WENDY. Of course it is small. But most people of our size wouldn't have a house at all. (*She should not have mentioned size, for he has already expressed displeasure at her growth. Another thing, one he has scarcely noticed, though it disturbs her, is that she does not see him quite so clearly now as she used to do.*) When you come for me next year, Peter —you will come, won't you?

PETER. Yes. (*Gloating*) To hear stories about me!

WENDY. It is so queer that the stories you like best should be the ones about yourself.

PETER (*touchy*). Well, then?

WENDY. Fancy your forgetting the lost boys, and even Captain Hook!

PETER. Well, then?

WENDY. I haven't seen Tink this time.

PETER. Who?

WENDY. Oh dear! I suppose it is because you have so many adventures.

PETER (*relieved*). 'Course it is.

WENDY. If another little girl—if one younger than I am— (*She can't go on.*) Oh, Peter, how I wish I could take you up and squdge you! (*He draws back.*) Yes, I know. (*She gets astride her broomstick.*) Home! (*It carries her from him over the tree-tops.*)

(*In a sort of way he understands what she means by 'Yes, I know,' but in most sorts of ways he doesn't. It has something to do with the riddle of his being. If he could get the hang of the thing his cry might become 'To live would be an awfully big adventure!' but he can never quite get the hang of it, and so no one is as gay as he. With rapturous face he produces his pipes, and the Never birds and the fairies gather closer, till*

the roof of the little house is so thick with his admirers that some of them fall down the chimney. He plays on and on till we wake up.)

THE WILL

THE WILL

THE scene is any lawyer's office.

It may be, and no doubt will be, the minute reproduction of some actual office, with all the characteristic appurtenances thereof, every blot of ink in its proper place; but for the purpose in hand any bare room would do just as well. The only thing essential to the room, save the two men sitting in it, is a framed engraving on the wall of Queen Victoria, which dates sufficiently the opening scene, and will be changed presently to King Edward; afterwards to King George, to indicate the passing of time. No other alteration is called for. Doubtless different furniture came in, and the tiling of the fireplace was renewed, and at last some one discovered that the flowers in the window-box were dead, but all that is as immaterial to the action as the new blue-bottles; the succession of monarchs will convey allegorically the one thing necessary, that time is passing, but that the office of Devizes, Devizes, and Devizes goes on.

The two men are Devizes Senior and Junior. Senior, who is middle-aged, succeeded to a good thing years ago, and as the curtain rises we see him bent over his table making it a better thing. It is

pleasant to think that before he speaks he adds another thirteen and fourpence, say, to the fortune of the firm.

Junior is quite a gay dog, twenty-three, and we catch him skilfully balancing an office ruler on his nose. He is recently from Oxford—

> If you show him in Hyde Park, lawk, how they will stare,
> Tho' a very smart figure in Bloomsbury Square.

Perhaps Junior is a smarter figure in the office (among the clerks) than he was at Oxford, but this is one of the few things about him that his shrewd father does not know.

There comes to them by the only door into the room a middle-aged clerk called Surtees, who is perhaps worth looking at, though his manner is that of one who has long ceased to think of himself as of any importance to either God or man. Look at him again, however (which few would do), and you may guess that he has lately had a shock—touched a living wire—and is a little dazed by it. He brings a card to Mr. Devizes, Senior, who looks at it and shakes his head.

MR. DEVIZES. 'Mr. Philip Ross.' Don't know him.

SURTEES (*who has an expressionless voice*). He says he wrote you two days ago, sir, explaining his business.

MR. DEVIZES. I have had no letter from a Philip Ross.

ROBERT. Nor I.

(*He is more interested in his feat with the ruler than in a possible client, but* SURTEES *looks at him oddly.*)

MR. DEVIZES. Surtees looks as if he thought you had.

(ROBERT *obliges by reflecting in the light of* SURTEES'S *countenance.*)

ROBERT. Ah, you think it may have been that one, Surty?

MR. DEVIZES (*sharply*). What one?

ROBERT. It was the day before yesterday. You were out, father, and Surtees brought me in some letters. His mouth was wide open. (*Thoughtfully*) I suppose that was why I did it.

MR. DEVIZES. What did you do?

ROBERT. I must have suddenly recalled a game we used to play at Oxford. You try to fling cards one by one into a hat. It requires great skill. So I cast one of the letters at Surtees's open mouth, and it missed him and went into the fire. It may have been Philip Ross's letter.

MR. DEVIZES (*wrinkling his brows*). Too bad, Robert.

ROBERT (*blandly*). Yes, you see I am out of practice.

SURTEES. He seemed a very nervous person, sir, and quite young. Not a gentleman of much consequence.

ROBERT (*airily*). Why not tell him to write again?

MR. DEVIZES. Not fair.

SURTEES. But she—

BOBERT. She? Who?

SURTEES. There is a young lady with him, sir. She is crying.

ROBERT. Pretty?

SURTEES. I should say she is pretty, sir, in a quite inoffensive way.

ROBERT (*for his own gratification*). Ha!

MR. DEVIZES. Well, when I ring show them in.

ROBERT (*with roguish finger*). And let this be a lesson to you, Surty, not to go about your business with your mouth open. (SURTEES *tries to smile as requested, but with poor success.*) Nothing the matter, Surty? You seem to have lost your sense of humour.

SURTEES (*humbly enough*). I'm afraid I have, sir. I never had very much, Mr. Robert.

(*He goes quietly. There has been a suppressed emotion about him that makes the incident poignant.*)

ROBERT. Anything wrong with Surtees, father?

MR. DEVIZES. Never mind him. I am very angry with you, Robert.

ROBERT (*like one conceding a point in a debating society*). And justly.

MR. DEVIZES (*frowning*). All we can do is to tell this Mr. Ross that we have not read his letter.

ROBERT (*bringing his knowledge of the world to bear*). Is that necessary?

MR. DEVIZES. We must admit that we don't know what he has come about.

ROBERT (*tolerant of his father's limitations*). But don't we?

MR. DEVIZES. Do you?

ROBERT. I rather think I can put two and two together.

MR. DEVIZES. Clever boy! Well, I shall leave them to you.

ROBERT. Right.

MR. DEVIZES. Your first case, Robert.

ROBERT (*undismayed*). It will be as good as a play to you to sit there and watch me discovering before they have been two minutes in the room what is the naughty thing that brings them here.

MR. DEVIZES (*drily*). I am always ready to take a lesson from the new generation. But of course we old fogies could do that also.

ROBERT. How?

MR. DEVIZES. By asking them.

ROBERT. Pooh. What did I go to Oxford for?

MR. DEVIZES. God knows. Are you ready?

ROBERT. Quite.

(MR. DEVIZES *rings.*)

MR. DEVIZES. By the way, we don't know the lady's name.

ROBERT. Observe me finding it out.

MR. DEVIZES. Is she married or single?

ROBERT. I'll know at a glance. And mark me, if she is married it is our nervous gentleman who has come between her and her husband; but if she is single it is little Wet Face who has come between him and his wife.

MR. DEVIZES. A Daniel!

(A young man and woman are shown in: very devoted to each other, though ROBERT *does not know it. Yet it is the one thing obvious about them; more obvious than his cheap suit, which she presses carefully beneath the mattress every night, or than the strength of his boyish face. Thinking of him as he then was by the light of subsequent events one wonders whether if he had come alone his face might have revealed something disquieting which was not there while she was by. Probably not; it was certainly already there, but had not yet reached the surface. With her, too, though she is to be what is called changed before we see them again, all seems serene; no warning signals; nothing in the way of their happiness in each other but this alarming visit to a lawyer's office. The stage di-*

rection might be 'Enter two lovers.' He is scarcely the less nervous of the two, but he enters stoutly in front of her as if to receive the first charge. She has probably nodded valiantly to him outside the door, where she let go his hand.)

ROBERT (*master of the situation*). Come in, Mr. Ross (*and he bows reassuringly to the lady*). My partner—indeed my father. (MR. DEVIZES *bows but remains in the background.*)

PRILIP (*with a gulp*). You got my letter?

ROBERT. Yes—yes.

PHILIP. I gave you the details in it.

ROBERT. Yes, I have them all in my head. (*Cleverly*) You will sit down, Miss— I don't think I caught the name.

(*As much as to say, 'You see, father, I spotted that she was single at once.'*)

MR. DEVIZES (*who has also formed his opinion*). You didn't ask for it, Robert.

ROBERT (*airily*). Miss—?

PHILIP. This is Mrs. Ross, my wife.

(ROBERT *is a little taken aback, and has a conviction that his father is smiling.*)

ROBERT. Ah yes, of course; sit down, please, Mrs. Ross.

(*She sits as if this made matters rather worse.*)

PHILIP (*standing guard by her side*). My wife is a little agitated.

ROBERT. Naturally. (*He tries a 'feeler.'*) These affairs—very painful at the time—but one gradually forgets.

EMILY (*with large eyes*). That is what Mr. Ross says, but somehow I can't help— (*The eyes fill*). You see, we have been married only four months.

ROBERT. Ah—that does make it—yes, certainly. (*He becomes the wife's champion, and frowns on* PHILIP.)

PHILIP. I suppose the sum seems very small to you?

ROBERT (*serenely*). I confess that is the impression it makes on me.

PHILIP. I wish it was more.

ROBERT (*at a venture*). You are sure you can't make it more?

PHILIP. How can I?

ROBERT. Ha!

EMILY (*with sudden spirit*). I think it's a great deal.

PHILIP. Mrs. Ross is so nice about it.

ROBERT (*taking a strong line*). I think so. But she must not be taken advantage of. And of course we shall have something to say as to the amount.

PHILIP (*blankly*). In what way? There it is.

ROBERT (*guardedly*). Hum. Yes, in a sense.

EMILY (*breaking down*). Oh dear!

ROBERT (*more determined than ever to do his best*

for this wronged woman). I am very sorry, Mrs. Ross. (*Sternly*) I hope, sir, you realise that the mere publicity to a sensitive woman—

PHILIP. Publicity?

ROBERT (*feeling that he has got him on the run*). Of course for her sake we shall try to arrange things so that the names do not appear. Still—

PHILIP. The names?

(*By this time* EMILY *is in tears.*)

EMILY. I can't help it. I love him so.

ROBERT (*still benighted*). Enough to forgive him? (*Seeing himself suddenly as a mediator*) Mrs. Ross, is it too late to patch things up?

PHILIP (*now in flame*). What do you mean, sir?

MR. DEVIZES (*who has been quietly enjoying himself*). Yes, Robert, what do you mean precisely?

ROBERT. Really I— (*he tries brow-beating*) I must tell you at once, Mr. Ross, that unless a client gives us his fullest confidence we cannot undertake a case of this kind.

PHILIP. A case of what kind, sir? If you are implying anything against my good name—

ROBERT. On your honour, sir, is there nothing against it?

PHILIP. I know of nothing, sir.

EMILY. Anything against my husband, Mr. Devizes! He is an angel.

ROBERT (*suddenly seeing that little Wet Face must be the culprit*). Then it is you!

EMILY. Oh, sir, what is me?

PHILIP. Answer that, sir.

ROBERT. Yes, Mr. Ross, I will. (*But he finds he cannot.*) On second thoughts I decline. I cannot believe it has been all this lady's fault, and I decline to have anything to do with such a painful case.

MR. DEVIZES (*promptly*). Then I will take it up.

PHILIP (*not to be placated*). I think your son has insulted me.

EMILY. Philip, come away.

MR. DEVIZES. One moment, please. As *I* did not see your letter, may I ask Mr. Ross what is your business with us?

PHILIP. I called to ask whether you would be so good as to draw up my will.

ROBERT (*blankly*). Your will! Is that all?

PHILIP. Certainly.

MR. DEVIZES. Now we know, Robert.

ROBERT. But Mrs. Ross's agitation?

PHILIP (*taking her hand*). She feels that to make my will brings my death nearer.

ROBERT. So that's it!

PHILIP. It was all in the letter.

MR. DEVIZES (*coyly*). Anything to say, Robert?

ROBERT. Most—ah—extremely— (*He has an in-*

spiration.) But even now I'm puzzled. You are Edgar Charles Ross?

PHILIP. No, Philip Ross.

ROBERT (*brazenly*). Philip Ross? We have made an odd mistake, father. (*There is a twinkle in* MR. DEVIZES's *eye. He watches interestedly to see how his son is to emerge from the mess.*) The fact is, Mrs. Ross, we are expecting to-day a Mr. Edgar Charles Ross on a matter—well—of a kind— Ah me! (*With fitting gravity*) His wife, in short.

EMILY (*who has not read the newspapers in vain*). How awful. How sad.

ROBERT. Sad indeed. You will quite understand that professional etiquette prevents my saying one word more.

PHILIP. Yes, of course—we have no desire— But I did write.

ROBERT. Assuredly. But about a will. That is my father's department. No doubt you recall the letter now, father?

MR. DEVIZES (*who if he won't hinder won't help*). I can't say I do.

ROBERT (*unabashed*). Odd. You must have overlooked it.

MR. DEVIZES. Ha! At all events, Mr. Ross, I am quite at your service now.

PHILIP. Thank you.

ROBERT (*still ready to sacrifice himself on the call of duty*). You don't need me any more, father?

MR. DEVIZES. No, Robert; many thanks. You run off to your club now and have a bit of lunch. You must be tired. Send Surtees in to me. (*To his clients*) My son had his first case to-day.

PHILIP (*politely*). I hope successfully.

MR. DEVIZES. Not so bad. He rather bungled it at first, but he got out of a hole rather cleverly. I think you'll make a lawyer yet, Robert.

ROBERT. Thank you, father. (*He goes jauntily, with a flower in his button-hole.*)

MR. DEVIZES. Now, Mr. Ross.

(*The young wife's hand goes out for comfort and finds* PHILIP'S *waiting for it.*)

PHILIP. What I want myself is that the will should all go into one sentence, 'I leave everything of which I die possessed to my beloved wife.'

MR. DEVIZES (*thawing to the romance of this young couple*). Well, there have been many worse wills than that, sir.

(EMILY *is emotional.*)

PHILIP. Don't give way, Emily.

EMILY. It was those words, 'of which I die possessed.' (*Imploring*) Surely he doesn't need to say that—please, Mr. Devizes?

MR. DEVIZES. Certainly not. I am confident I can draw up the will without mentioning death at all.

EMILY (*huskily*). Oh, thank you.

MR. DEVIZES. At the same time, of course, in a legal document in which the widow is the sole—

(EMILY *again needs attention.*)

PHILIP (*reproachfully*). What was the need of saying 'widow'?

MR. DEVIZES. I beg your pardon, Mrs. Ross. I unreservedly withdraw the word 'widow.' Forgive a stupid old solicitor. (*She smiles gratefully through her tears.* SURTEES *comes in.*) Surtees, just take a few notes, please. (SURTEES *sits in the background and takes notes.*) The facts of the case as I understand, Mrs. Ross, are these: Your husband—(*quickly*) who is in the prime of health—but knows life to be uncertain—

EMILY. Oh!

MR. DEVIZES. —though usually, as we learn from holy script itself, it lasts seven times ten years—and believing that he will in all probability live the allotted span, nevertheless, because of his love of you, thinks it judicious to go through the form—it is a mere form—of making a will.

EMILY (*fervently*). Oh, thank you.

MR. DEVIZES. Any details, Mr. Ross?

PHILIP. I am an orphan. I live at Belvedere, 14 Tulphin Road, Hammersmith.

EMILY (*to whom the address has a seductive sound*). We live there.

PHILIP. And I am a clerk in the employ of Curar and Gow, the foreign coaling agents.

MR. DEVIZES. Yes, yes. Any private income?

(*They cannot help sniggering a little at the quaint question.*)

PHILIP. Oh no!

MR. DEVIZES. I see it will be quite a brief will.

PHILIP (*to whom the remark sounds scarcely worthy of a great occasion*). My income is a biggish one.

MR. DEVIZES. Yes?

EMILY (*important*). He has £170 a year.

MR. DEVIZES. Ah!

PHILIP. I began at £60. But it is going up, Mr. Devizes, by leaps and bounds. Another £15 this year.

MR. DEVIZES. Good.

PHILIP (*darkly*). I have a certain ambition.

EMILY (*eagerly*). Tell him, Philip.

PHILIP (*with a big breath*). We have made up our minds to come to £365 a year before I—retire.

EMILY. That is a pound a day.

MR. DEVIZES (*smiling sympathetically on them*). So it is. My best wishes.

PHILIP. Thank you. Of course the furnishing took a good deal.

MR. DEVIZES. It would.

EMILY. He insisted on my having the very best.

(*She ceases. She is probably thinking of her superb spare bedroom.*)

PHILIP. But we are not a penny in debt; and I have £200 saved.

MR. DEVIZES. I think you have made a brave beginning.

EMILY. They have the highest opinion of him in the office.

PHILIP. Then I am insured for £500.

MR. DEVIZES. I am glad to hear that.

PHILIP. Of course I would like to leave her a house in Kensington and a carriage and pair.

MR. DEVIZES. Who knows, perhaps you will.

EMILY. Oh!

MR. DEVIZES. Forgive me.

EMILY. What would houses and horses be to me without him?

MR. DEVIZES (*soothingly*). Quite so. What I take Mr. Ross to mean is that when he dies—if he ever should die—everything is to go to his—his spouse.

PHILIP (*dogged*). Yes.

EMILY (*dogged*). No.

PHILIP (*sighing*). This is the only difference we have ever had. Mrs. Ross insists on certain bequests. You see, I have two cousins, ladies, not well off, whom I have been in the way of helping a little. But in my will, how can I?

MR. DEVIZES. You must think first of your wife.

PHILIP. But she insists on my leaving £50 to each of them.

(*He looks appealingly to his wife.*)

EMILY (*grandly*). £100.

PHILIP. £50.

EMILY. Dear, £100.

MR. DEVIZES. Let us say £75.

PHILIP (*reluctantly*). Very well.

EMILY. No, £100.

PHILIP. She'll have to get her way. Here are their names and addresses.

MR. DEVIZES. Anything else?

PHILIP (*hurriedly*). No.

EMILY. The convalescent home, dear. He was in it a year ago, and they were so kind.

PHILIP. Yes, but—

EMILY. £10. (*He has to yield, with a reproachful, admiring look.*)

MR. DEVIZES. Then if that is all, I won't detain you. If you look in to-morrow, Mr. Ross, about this time, we shall have everything ready for you.

(*Their faces fall.*)

EMILY. Oh, Mr. Devizes, if only it could all be drawn up now, and done with.

PHILIP. You see, sir, we are screwed up to it to-day.

(*'Our fate is in your hands,' they might be saying, and the lawyer smiles to find himself such a power.*)

MR. DEVIZES (*looking at his watch*). Well, it certainly need not take long. You go out and have lunch somewhere, and then come back.

EMILY. Oh, don't ask me to eat.

PHILIP. We are too excited.

EMILY. Please may we just walk about the street?

MR. DEVIZES (*smiling*). Of course you may, you ridiculous young wife.

EMILY. I know it's ridiculous of me, but I am so fond of him.

MR. DEVIZES. Yes, it is ridiculous. (*Kindly, and with almost a warning note*) But don't change; especially if you get on in the world, Mr. Ross.

PHILIP. No fear!

EMILY (*backing from the will, which may now be said to be in existence*). And please don't give us a copy of it to keep. I would rather not have it in the house.

MR. DEVIZES (*nodding reassuringly*). In an hour's time. (*They go, and the lawyer has his lunch, which is simpler than* ROBERT'S: *a sandwich and a glass of wine. He speaks as he eats.*) You will get that ready, Surtees. Here are the names and addresses he left. (*Cheerily*) A nice couple.

SURTEES (*who is hearing another voice*). Yes, sir.

MR. DEVIZES (*unbending*). Little romance of its kind. Makes one feel quite gay.

SURTEES. Yes, sir.

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MR. DEVIZES (*struck perhaps by the deadness of his voice*). You don't look very gay, Surtees.

SURTEES. I'm sorry, sir. We can't all be gay. (*He is going out without looking at his employer.*) I'll see to this, sir.

MR. DEVIZES. Stop a minute. Is there anything wrong? (SURTEES *has difficulty in answering, and* MR. DEVIZES *goes to him kindly.*) Not worrying over that matter we spoke about? (SURTEES *inclines his head.*) Is the pain worse?

SURTEES. It's no great pain, sir.

MR. DEVIZES (*uncomfortably*). I'm sure it's not —what you fear. Any specialist would tell you so.

SURTEES (*without looking up*). I have been to one, sir—yesterday.

MR. DEVIZES. Well?

SURTEES. It's—that, sir.

MR. DEVIZES. He couldn't be sure.

SURTEES. Yes, sir.

MR. DEVIZES. An operation—

SURTEES. Too late, he said, for that. If I had been operated on long ago there might have been a chance.

MR. DEVIZES. But you didn't have it long ago.

SURTEES. Not to my knowledge, sir; but he says it was there all the same, always in me, a black spot, not so big as a pin's head, but waiting to spread and destroy me in the fulness of time. All the rest of me as sound as a bell. (*That is the voice that* SURTEES *has been hearing.*)

MR. DEVIZES (*helpless*). It seems damnably unfair.

SURTEES (*humbly*). I don't know, sir. He says there's a spot of that kind in pretty nigh all of us, and if we don't look out it does for us in the end.

MR. DEVIZES (*hurriedly*). No, no, no.

SURTEES. He called it the accursed thing. I think he meant we should know of it and be on the watch. (*He pulls himself together.*) I'll see to this at once, sir.

(*He goes out.* MR. DEVIZES *continues his lunch.*

The curtain falls here for a moment only, to indicate the passing of a number of years. When it rises we see that the engraving of Queen Victoria has given way to one of King Edward.

ROBERT *is discovered, immersed in affairs. He is now a middle-aged man who has long forgotten how to fling cards into a hat. To him comes* SENNET, *a brisk clerk.*)

SENNET. Mrs. Philip Ross to see you, sir.

ROBERT. Mr. Ross, don't you mean, Sennet?

SENNET. No, sir.

ROBERT. Ha. It was Mr. Ross I was expecting. Show her in. (*Frowning*) And, Sennet, less row in the office, if you please.

SENNET (*glibly*). It was those young clerks, sir—

ROBERT. They mustn't be young here, or they go. Tell them that.

SENNET (*glad to be gone*). Yes, sir.

(*He shows in* MRS. ROSS. *We have not seen her for twenty years and would certainly not recognise her in the street. So shrinking her first entrance into this room, but she sails in now like a galleon. She is not so much dressed as richly upholstered. She is very sure of herself. Yet she is not a different woman from the* EMILY *we remember; the pity of it is that somehow this is the same woman.*)

ROBERT (*who makes much of his important visitor and is also wondering why she has come*). This is a delightful surprise, Mrs. Ross. Allow me. (*He removes her fine cloak with proper solicitude, and* EMILY *walks out of it in the manner that makes it worth possessing.*) This chair, alas, is the best I can offer you.

EMILY (*who is still a good-natured woman if you attempt no nonsense with her*). It will do quite well.

ROBERT (*gallantly*). Honoured to see you in it.

EMILY (*smartly*). Not you. You were saying to yourself, 'Now, what brings the woman here?'

ROBERT. Honestly, I—

EMILY. And I'll tell you. You are expecting Mr. Ross, I think?

ROBERT (*cautiously*). Well—ah—

EMILY. Pooh! The cunning of you lawyers. I know he has an appointment with you, and that is why I've come.

ROBERT. He arranged with you to meet him here?

EMILY (*preening herself*). I wouldn't say that. I don't know that he will be specially pleased to find me here when he comes.

ROBERT (*guardedly*). Oh?

EMILY (*who is now a woman that goes straight to* her goal). I know what he is coming about. To make a new will.

ROBERT (*admitting it*). After all, not the first he has made with us, Mrs. Ross.

EMILY (*promptly*). No, the fourth.

ROBERT (*warming his hands at the thought*). Such a wonderful career. He goes from success to success.

EMILY (*complacently*). Yes, we're big folk.

ROBERT. You are indeed.

EMILY (*sharply*). But the last will covered everything.

ROBERT (*on guard again*). Of course it is a matter I cannot well discuss even with you. And I know nothing of his intentions.

EMILY. Well, I suspect some of them.

ROBERT. Ah!

EMILY. And that's why I'm here. Just to see that he does nothing foolish.

(*She settles herself more comfortably as* MR. ROSS *is announced. A city magnate walks in. You know he is that before you see that he is* PHILIP ROSS.)

PHILIP (*speaking as he enters*). How do, Devizes, how do. Well, let us get at this thing at once. Time is money, you know, time is money. (*Then he sees his wife*). Hello, Emily.

EMILY (*unperturbed*). You didn't ask me to come, Philip, but I thought I might as well.

PHILIP. That's all right.

(*His brow had lowered at first sight of her, but now he gives her cleverness a grin of respect.*)

EMILY. It is the first will you have made without taking me into your confidence.

PHILIP. No important changes. I just thought to save you the—unpleasantness of the thing.

EMILY. How do you mean?

PHILIP (*fidgeting*). Well, one can't draw up a will without feeling for the moment that he is bringing his end nearer. Is that not so, Devizes?

ROBERT (*who will quite possibly die intestate*). Some do have that feeling.

EMILY. But what nonsense. How can it have any effect of that kind one way or the other?

ROBERT. Quite so.

EMILY (*reprovingly*). Just silly sentiment, Philip. I should have thought it would be a pleasure to you, handling such a big sum.

PHILIP (*wincing*). Not handling it, giving it up.

EMILY. To those you love.

PHILIP (*rather shortly*). I'm not giving it up yet. You talk as if I was on my last legs.

EMILY (*imperturbably*). Not at all. It's you that are doing that.

ROBERT (*to the rescue*). Here is my copy of the last will. I don't know if you would like me to read it out?

PHILIP. It's hardly necessary.

EMILY. We have our own copy at home, and we know it well.

PHILIP (*sitting back in his chair*). What do you think I'm worth to-day, Devizes?

(*Every one smiles. It is as if the sun had peeped in at the window.*)

ROBERT. I daren't guess.

PHILIP. An easy seventy thou.

EMILY. And that's not counting the house and the country cottage. We call it a cottage. You should see it!

ROBERT. I have heard of it.

EMILY (*more sharply, though the sun still shines*). Well, go on, Philip. I suppose you are not thinking of cutting me out of anything?

PHILIP (*heartily*). Of course not. There will be more to you than ever.

EMILY (*coolly*). There's more to leave.

PHILIP (*hesitating*). At the same time—

EMILY. Well? It's to be mine absolutely, of course. Not just a life interest.

PHILIP (*doggedly*). That is a change I was thinking of.

EMILY. Just what I have suspected for days. Will you please to say why?

ROBERT (*whose client after all is the man*). Of course it is quite common.

EMILY. I didn't think my husband was quite common.

ROBERT. I only mean that as there are children—

PHILIP. That's what I mean too.

EMILY. And I can't be trusted to leave my money to my own children! In what way have I ever failed them before?

PHILIP (*believing it too*). Never, Emily, never. A more devoted mother— If you have one failing it is that you spoil them.

EMILY. Then what's your reason?

PHILIP (*less sincerely*). Just to save you worry when I'm gone.

EMILY. It's no worry to me to look after my money.

PHILIP (*bridling*). After all, it's my money.

EMILY. I knew that was what was at the back of your mind.

PHILIP (*reverently*). It's such a great sum.

EMILY. One would think you were afraid I might marry again.

PHILIP (*snapping*). One would think you looked to my dying next week.

EMILY. Tuts!

(PHILIP *is unable to sit still.*)

PHILIP. My money. If you were to invest it badly and lose it! I tell you, Devizes, I couldn't lie quiet in my grave if I thought my money was lost by injudicious investments.

EMILY (*coldly*). You are thinking of yourself, Philip, rather than of the children.

PHILIP. Not at all.

ROBERT (*hastily*). How are the two children?

EMILY. Though I say it myself, there never were better. Harry is at Eton, you know, the most fashionable school in the country.

ROBERT. Doing well, I hope?

PHILIP (*chuckling*). We have the most gratifying letters from him. Last Saturday he was caught smoking cigarettes with a lord. (*With pardonable pride*) They were sick together.

ROBERT. And Miss Gwendolen? She must be almost grown up now.

(*The parents exchange important glances.*)

EMILY. Should we tell him?

PHILIP. Under the rose, you know, Devizes.

ROBERT. Am I to congratulate her?

EMILY. No names, Philip.

PHILIP. No, no names—but she won't be a plain Mrs., no, sir.

ROBERT. Well done, Miss Gwendolen. (*With fitting jocularity*) Now I see why you want a new will.

PHILIP. Yes, that's my main reason, Emily.

EMILY. But none of your life interests for me, Philip.

PHILIP (*shying*). We'll talk that over presently.

ROBERT. Will you keep the legacies as they are?

PHILIP. Well, there's that £500 for the hospitals.

EMILY. Yes, with so many claims on us, is that necessary?

PHILIP (*becoming stouter*). I'm going to make it £1000.

EMILY. Philip!

PHILIP. My mind is made up. I want to make a splash with the hospitals.

ROBERT (*hurrying to the next item*). There is £50 a year each to two cousins, ladies.

PHILIP. I suppose we'll keep that as it is, Emily?

EMILY. It was just gifts to them of £100 each at first.

PHILIP. I was poor at that time myself.

EMILY. Do you think it's wise to load them with so much money? They'll not know what to do with it.

PHILIP. They're old.

EMILY. But they're wiry. £75 a year between them would surely be enough.

PHILIP. It would be if they lived together, but you see they don't. They hate each other like cat and dog.

EMILY. That's not nice between relatives. You could leave it to them on condition that they do live together. That would be a Christian action.

PHILIP. There's something in that.

ROBERT. Then the chief matter is whether Mrs. Ross—

EMILY. Oh, I thought that was settled.

PHILIP (*with a sigh*). I'll have to give in to her, sir.

ROBERT. Very well. I suppose my father will want to draw up the will. I'm sorry he had to be in the country to-day.

EMILY (*affable now that she has gained her point*). I hope he is wearing well?

ROBERT. Wonderfully. He is away playing golf.

PHILIP (*grinning*). Golf. I have no time for games. (*Considerately*) But he must get the drawing up of my will. I couldn't deprive the old man of that.

ROBERT. He will be proud to do it again.

PHILIP (*well satisfied*). Ah! There's many a one would like to look over your father's shoulder when

he's drawing up my will. I wonder what I'll cut up for in the end. But I must be going.

EMILY. Can I drop you anywhere? I have the greys out.

PHILIP. Yes, at the club.

(*Now* MRS. ROSS *walks into her cloak.*)

Good-day, Devizes. I won't have time to look in again, so tell the old man to come to me.

ROBERT (*deferentially*). Whatever suits you best. (*Ringing.*) He will be delighted. I remember his saying to me on the day you made your first will—

PHILIP (*chuckling*). A poor little affair that.

ROBERT. He said to me you were a couple whose life looked like being a romance.

PHILIP. And he was right—eh, Emily?—though he little thought what a romance.

EMILY. No, he little thought what a romance.

(*They make a happy departure, and* ROBERT *is left reflecting.*

The curtain again falls, and rises immediately, as the engraving shows, on the same office in the reign of King George. It is a foggy morning and a fire burns briskly. MR. DEVIZES, SENIOR, *arrives for the day's work just as he came daily for over half a century. But he has no right to be here now. A year or two ago they got him to retire, as he was grown feeble; and there is an*

understanding that he does not go out of his house alone. He has, as it were, escaped to-day, and his feet have carried him to the old office that is the home of his mind. He was almost portly when we saw him first, but he has become little again and as light as the schoolboy whose deeds are nearer to him than many of the events of later years. He arrives at the office, thinking it is old times, and a clerk surveys him uncomfortably from the door.)

CREED (*not quite knowing what to do*). Mr. Devizes has not come in yet, sir.

MR. DEVIZES (*considering*). Yes, I have. Do you mean Mr. Robert?

CREED. Yes, sir.

MR. DEVIZES (*querulously*). Always late. Can't get that boy to settle down. (*Leniently*) Well, well, boys will be boys—eh, Surtees?

CREED (*wishing* MR. ROBERT *would come*). My name is Creed, sir.

MR. DEVIZES (*sharply*). Creed? Don't know you. Where is Surtees?

CREED. There is no one of that name in the office, sir.

MR. DEVIZES (*growing timid*). No? I remember now. Poor Surtees! (*But his mind cannot grapple with troubles*). Tell him I want him when he comes in.

(*He is changing, after his old custom, into an office coat.*)

CREED. That is Mr. Dev— Mr. Robert's coat, sir.

MR. DEVIZES. He has no business to hang it there. That is my nail.

CREED. He has hung it there for years, sir.

MR. DEVIZES. Not at all. I must have it. Why does Surtees let him do it? Help me into my office coat, boy.

(CREED *helps him into the coat he has taken off, and the old man is content.*)

CREED (*seeing him lift up the correspondence*). I don't think Mr. Devizes would like you to open the office letters, sir.

MR. DEVIZES (*pettishly*). What's that? Go away, boy. Send Surtees.

(*To the relief of* CREED, ROBERT *arrives, and, taking in the situation, signs to the clerk to go. He has a more youthful manner than when last we saw him has* ROBERT, *but his hair is iron grey. He is kindly to his father.*)

ROBERT. You here, father?

MR. DEVIZES (*after staring at him*). Yes, you are Robert. (*A little frightened*) You are an old man, Robert.

ROBERT (*without wincing*). Getting on, father. But why did they let you come? You haven't been here for years.

MR. DEVIZES (*puzzled*). Years? I think I just came in the old way, Robert, without thinking.

ROBERT. Yes, yes. I'll get some one to go home with you.

MR. DEVIZES (*rather abject*). Let me stay, Robert. I like being here. I won't disturb you. I like the smell of the office, Robert.

ROBERT. Of course you may stay. Come over to the fire. (*He settles his father by the fire in the one arm-chair.*) There; you can have a doze by the fire.

MR. DEVIZES. A doze by the fire. That is all I'm good for now. Once—but my son hangs his coat there now. (*Then he looks up fearfully*) Robert, tell me something in a whisper: Is Surtees dead?

ROBERT (*who has forgotten the name*). Surtees?

MR. DEVIZES. My clerk, you know.

ROBERT. Oh, why, he has been dead this thirty years, father.

MR. DEVIZES. So long. Seems like yesterday.

ROBERT. It is just far back times that seem clear to you now.

MR. DEVIZES (*meekly*). Is it?

(ROBERT *opens his letters, and his father falls asleep.* CREED *comes.*)

CREED. Sir Philip Ross.

(*The great* SIR PHILIP *enters, nearly sixty now, strong of frame still, but a lost man. He is in mourning, and carries the broken pieces of his*

life with an air of braggadocio. It should be understood that he is not a 'sympathetic' part, and any actor who plays him as such will be rolling the play in the gutter.)

ROBERT (*on his feet at once to greet such a client*). You, Sir Philip?

PHILIP (*head erect*). Here I am.

ROBERT (*because it will out*). How are you?

PHILIP (*as if challenged*). I'm all right—great. (*With defiant jocularity*) Called on the old business.

ROBERT. To make another will?

PHILIP. You've guessed it—the very first time. (*He sees the figure by the fire.*)

ROBERT. Yes, it's my father. He's dozing. Shouldn't be here at all. He forgets things. It's just age.

PHILIP (*grimly*). Forgets things. That must be fine.

ROBERT (*conventionally*). I should like, Sir Philip, to offer you my sincere condolences. In the midst of life we are— How true that is. I attended the funeral.

PHILIP. I saw you.

ROBERT. A much-esteemed lady. I had a great respect for her.

PHILIP (*almost with relish*). Do you mind, when we used to come here about the will, somehow she —we—always took for granted I should be the first to go?

ROBERT (*devoutly*). These things are hid from mortal eyes.

PHILIP (*with conviction*). There's a lot hid. We needn't have worried so much about the will if—well, let us get at it. (*Fiercely*) I haven't given in, you know.

ROBERT. We must bow our heads—

PHILIP. Must we? Am I bowing mine?

ROBERT (*uncomfortably*). Such courage in the great hour—yes—and I am sure Lady Ross—

PHILIP (*with the ugly humour that has come to him*). She wasn't that.

ROBERT. The honour came so soon afterwards—I feel she would like to be thought of as Lady Ross. I shall always remember her as a fine lady richly dressed who used—

PHILIP (*harshly*). Stop it. That's not how I think of her. There was a time before that—she wasn't richly dressed—(*he stamps upon his memories*). Things went wrong, I don't know how. It's a beast of a world. I didn't come here to talk about that. Let us get to work.

ROBERT (*turning with relief from the cemetery*). Yes, yes, and after all life has its compensations. You have your son who—

PHILIP (*snapping*). No, I haven't. (*This startles the lawyer.*) I'm done with him.

ROBERT. If he has been foolish—

PHILIP. Foolish! (*Some dignity comes into the man.*) Sir, I have come to a pass when foolish as applied to my own son would seem to me a very pretty word.

ROBERT. Is it as bad as that?

PHILIP. He's a rotter.

ROBERT. It is very painful to me to hear you say that.

PHILIP. More painful, think you, than for me to say it? (*Clenching his fists*) But I've shipped him off. The law had to wink at it, or I couldn't have done it. Why don't you say I pampered him and it serves me right? It's what they are all saying behind my back. Why don't you ask me about my girl? That's another way to rub it in.

ROBERT. Don't, Sir Philip. I knew about her. My sympathy—

PHILIP. A chauffeur! that is what he was. The man who drove her own car.

ROBERT. I was deeply concerned—

PHILIP. I want nobody's pity. I've done with both of them, and if you think I'm a broken man you're much mistaken. I'll show them. Have you your papers there? Then take down my last will. I have everything in my head. I'll show them.

ROBERT. Would it not be better to wait till a calmer—

PHILIP. Will you do it now, or am I to go across the street?

ROBERT. If I must.

PHILIP. Then down with it. (*He wets his lips.*) I, Philip Ross, of 77 Bath Street, W., do hereby revoke all former wills and testaments, and I leave everything of which I die possessed—

ROBERT. Yes?

PHILIP. Everything of which I die possessed—

ROBERT. Yes?

PHILIP. I leave it—I leave it— (*The game is up.*) My God, Devizes, I don't know what to do with it.

ROBERT. I—I—really—come—

PHILIP (*cynically*). Can't you make any suggestions?

ROBERT. Those cousins are dead, I think?

PHILIP. Years ago.

ROBERT (troubled). In the case of such a large sum—

PHILIP (*letting all his hoarded gold run through his fingers*). The money I've won with my blood. God in heaven. (*Showing his teeth.*) Would that old man like it to play with? If I bring it to you in sacks, will you fling it out of the window for me?

ROBERT. Sir Philip!

PHILIP (*taking a paper from his pocket*). Here, take this. It has the names and addresses of the half-dozen men I've fought with most for gold; and I've beaten them. Draw up a will leaving all my money

to be divided between them, with my respectful curses, and bring it to my house and I'll sign it.

ROBERT (*properly shocked*). But really I can't possibly—

PHILIP. Either you or another; is it to be you?

ROBERT. Very well.

PHILIP. Then that's settled. (*He rises with an ugly laugh. He regards* MR. DEVIZES *quizzically.*) So you weren't in at the last will after all, old Sleep by the Fire.

(*To their surprise the old man stirs.*)

MR. DEVIZES. What's that about a will?

ROBERT. You are awake, father?

MR. DEVIZES (*whose eyes have opened on* PHILIP'S *face*). I don't know you, sir.

ROBERT. Yes, yes, father, you remember Mr. Ross. He is Sir Philip now.

MR. DEVIZES (*courteously*). Sir Philip? I wish you joy, sir, but I don't know you.

ROBERT (*encouragingly*). Ross, father.

MR. DEVIZES. I knew a Mr. Ross long ago.

BOBERT. This is the same.

MR. DEVIZES (*annoyed*). No, no. A bright young fellow he was, with such a dear, pretty wife. They came to make a will. (*He chuckles.*) And bless me, they had only twopence halfpenny. I took a fancy to them; such a happy pair.

ROBERT (*apologetically*). The past is clearer to him than the present nowadays. That will do, father.

PHILIP (*brusquely*). Let him go on.

MR. DEVIZES. Poor souls, it all ended unhappily, you know.

PHILIP (*who is not brusque to him*). Yes, I know. Why did things go wrong, sir? I sit and wonder, and I can't find the beginnings.

MR. DEVIZES. That's the sad part of it. There was never a beginning. It was always there. He told me all about it.

ROBERT. He is thinking of something else; I don't know what.

PHILIP. Quiet. What was it that was always there?

MR. DEVIZES. It was always in them—a spot no bigger than a pin's head, but waiting to spread and destroy them in the fulness of time.

ROBERT. I don't know what he has got hold of.

PHILIP. He knows. Could they have done anything to prevent it, sir?

MR. DEVIZES. If they had been on the watch. But they didn't know, so they weren't on the watch. Poor souls!

PHILIP. Poor souls!

MR. DEVIZES. It's called the accursed thing. It gets nearly everybody in the end, if they don't look out.

(*He sinks back into his chair and forgets them.*)

ROBERT. He is just wandering.

PHILIP. The old man knows.

(*He slowly tears up the paper he had given* ROBERT.)

ROBERT (*relieved*). I am glad to see you do that.

PHILIP. A spot no bigger than a pin's head. (*A wish wells up in him, too late perhaps.*) I wish I could help some young things before that spot has time to spread and destroy them as it has destroyed me and mine.

ROBERT (*brightly*). With such a large fortune—

PHILIP (*summing up his life*). It can't be done with money, sir.

(*He goes away; God knows where.*)

A WELL-REMEMBERED VOICE

A WELL-REMEMBERED VOICE

Out of the darkness comes the voice of a woman speaking to her dead son.

'But that was against your wish, was it not? Was that against your wish? Would you prefer me not to ask that question?'

The room is so dark that we cannot see her. All we know is that she is one of four shapes gathered round a small table. Beyond the darkness is a great ingle-nook, in which is seated on a settle a man of fifty. Him we can discern fitfully by the light of the fire. It is not sufficiently bright to enable him to read, but an evening paper lies on his knee. He is paying no attention to the party round the table. When he hears their voices it is only as empty sounds.

The mother continues. 'Perhaps I am putting the question in the wrong way. Are you not able to tell us any more?'

A man's voice breaks in. 'There was a distinct movement that time, but it is so irregular.'

'I thought so, but please don't talk. Do you want to tell us more? Is it that you can't hear me distinctly? He seems to want to tell us more, but something prevents him.'

'In any case, Mrs. Don, it is extraordinary. This is

the first séance I have ever taken part in, but I must believe now.'

'Of course, Major, these are the simplest manifestations. They are only the first step. But if we are to go on, the less we talk the better. Shall we go on? It is not agitating you too much, Laura?'

A girl answers. 'There was a moment when I—but I wish I was braver. I think it is partly the darkness. I suppose we can't have a little light?'

'Certainly we can, dear. Darkness is quite unnecessary, but I think it helps one to concentrate.'

The Major lights a lamp, and though it casts shadows we see now that the room is an artist's studio. The silent figure in the ingle-nook is the artist. Mrs. Don is his wife; the two men are Major Armitage and an older friend, Mr. Rogers. The girl is Laura Bell. These four are sitting round the table, their hands touching: they are endeavouring to commune with one who has 'crossed the gulf.'

The Major and Mr. Rogers are but passing shadows in the play, and even nice Laura is only to flit across its few pages for a moment on her way to happier things. We scarcely notice those three in the presence of Mrs. Don, the gracious, the beautiful, the sympathetic, whose magnetic force and charm are such that we wish to sit at her feet at once. She is intellectual, but with a disarming smile; religious, but so charitable; masterful, and yet loved of all.

None is perfect, and there must be a flaw in her somewhere, but to find it would necessitate such a rummage among her many adornments as there is now no time for. Perhaps we may come upon it accidentally in the course of the play.

She is younger than Mr. Don, who, despite her efforts for many years to cover his deficiencies, is a man of no great account in a household where the bigger personality of his wife swallows him like an Aaron's rod. Mr. Don's deficiencies! She used to try very hard, or fairly hard, to conceal them from Dick; but Dick knew. His mother was his chum. All the lovely things which happened in that house in the days when Dick was alive were between him and her; those two shut the door softly on old Don, always anxious not to hurt his feelings, and then ran into each other's arms.

In the better light Mr. Don is now able to read his paper if he chooses. If he has forgotten the party at the table, they have equally forgotten him.

MRS. DON. You have not gone away, have you? We must be patient. Are you still there?

ROGERS. I think I felt a movement.

MRS. DON. Don't talk, please. Are you still there?

(*The table moves.*)

Yes! It is your mother who is speaking; do you understand that?

(*The table moves.*)

Yes. What shall I ask him now?

ROGERS. We leave it to you, Mrs. Don.

MRS. DON. Have you any message you want to send us? Yes. Is it important? Yes. Are we to spell it out in the usual way? Yes. Is the first letter of the first word A? Is it B?

(*She continues through the alphabet to L, when the table responds. Similarly she finds that the second letter is O.*)

Is the word *Love?* Yes. But I don't understand that movement. You are not displeased with us, are you? No. Does the second word begin with A?—with B? Yes.

(*The second word is spelt out* Bade *and the third* Me.)

Love Bade Me— If it is a quotation, I believe I know it! Is the fourth word *Welcome?* Yes.

LAURA. Love Bade Me Welcome.

MRS. DON. That movement again! Don't you want me to go on?

LAURA. Let us stop.

MRS. DON. Not unless he wishes it. Why are those words so important? Does the message end there? Is any one working against you? Some one antagonistic? Yes. Not one of ourselves, surely? No. Is it any one we know? Yes. Can I get the name in

the usual way? Yes. Is the first letter of this person's name A?—B?—

(*It proves to be F. One begins to notice a quaint peculiarity of* MRS. DON'S. *She is so accustomed to homage that she expects a prompt response even from the shades.*)

Is the second letter A?

(*The table moves.*)

FA. Fa—?

(*She is suddenly enlightened.*)

Is the word Father? Yes.

(*They all turn and look for the first time at* MR. DON. *He has heard, and rises apologetically.*)

MR. DON (*distressed*). I had no intention— Should I go away, Grace?

(*She answers sweetly without a trace of the annoyance she must surely feel.*)

MRS. DON. Perhaps you had better, Robert.

ROGERS. I suppose it is because he is an unbeliever? He is not openly antagonistic, is he?

MRS. DON (*sadly enough*). I am afraid he is.

(*They tend to discuss the criminal as if he was not present.*)

MAJOR. But he must admit that we do get messages.

MRS. DON (*reluctantly*). He says we think we do. He says they would not want to communicate with us if they had such trivial things to say.

ROGERS. But we are only on the threshold, Don. This is just a beginning.

LAURA. Didn't you hear, Mr. Don—'Love Bade Me Welcome'?

MR. DON. Does that strike you as important, Laura?

LAURA. He said it was.

MRS. DON. It might be very important to him, though we don't understand why.

(*She speaks gently, but there is an obstinacy in him, despite his meekness.*)

MR. DON. I didn't mean to be antagonistic, Grace. I thought—I wasn't thinking of it at all.

MRS. DON. Not thinking of Dick, Robert? And it was only five months ago!

MR. DON (*who is somehow, without meaning it, always in the wrong*). I'll go.

ROGERS. A boy wouldn't turn his father out. Ask him.

MR. DON (*forlornly*). As to that—as to that—

MRS. DON. I shall ask him if you wish me to, Robert.

MR. DON. No, don't.

ROGERS. It can't worry you as you are a disbeliever.

MR. DON. No, but—I shouldn't like you to think that he sent me away.

ROGERS. He won't. Will he, Mrs. Don?

MR. DON (*knowing what her silence implies*). You see, Dick and I were not very—no quarrel or anything of that sort—but I—I didn't much matter to Dick. I'm too old, perhaps.

MRS. DON (*gently*). I won't ask him, Robert, if you would prefer me not to.

MR. DON. I'll go.

MRS. DON. I'm afraid it is too late now. (*She turns away from earthly things.*) Do you want me to break off?

(*The table moves.*)

Yes. Do you send me your love, Dick? Yes. And to Laura? Yes. (*She raises her eyes to* DON, *and hesitates.*) Shall I ask him—?

MR. DON. No, no, don't.

ROGERS. It would be all right, Don.

MR. DON. I don't know.

(*They leave the table.*)

LAURA (*a little agitated*). May I go to my room, Mrs. Don? I feel I—should like to be alone.

MRS. DON. Yes, yes, Laura dear. I shall come in and see you.

(LAURA *bids them good-night and goes. She likes* MR. DON, *she strokes his hand when he holds it out to her, but she can't help saying, 'Oh, Mr. Don, how could you?'*)

ROGERS. I think we must all want to be alone after such an evening. I shall say good-night, Mrs. Don.

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MAJOR. Same here. I go your way, Rogers, but you will find me a silent companion. One doesn't want to talk ordinary things to-night. Rather not. Thanks, awfully.

ROGERS. Good-night, Don. It's a pity, you know; a bit hard on your wife.

MR. DON. Good-night, Rogers. Good-night, Major.

(The husband and wife, left together, have not much to say to each other. He is depressed because he has spoilt things for her. She is not angry. She knows that he can't help being as he is, and that there are fine spaces in her mind where his thoughts can never walk with hers. But she would forgive him seventy times seven because he is her husband. She is standing looking at a case of fishing-rods against the wall. There is a Jock Scott still sticking in one of them.)

MR. DON (*as if somehow they were evidence against him*). Dick's fishing-rods.

MRS. DON (*forgivingly*). I hope you don't mind my keeping them in the studio, Robert. They are sacred things to *me*.

MR. DON. That's all right, Grace.

MRS. DON. I think I shall go to Laura now.

MR. DON (*in his inexpressive way*). Yes.

MRS. DON. Poor child!

MR. DON. I'm afraid I hurt her.

MRS. DON. Dick wouldn't have liked it—but Dick's gone. (*She looks a little wonderingly at him. After all these years, she can sometimes wonder a little still.*) I suppose you will resume your evening paper?

(*He answers quietly, but with the noble doggedness which is the reason why we write this chapter in his life.*)

MR. DON. Why not, Grace?

(*She considers, for she is so sure that she must know the answer better than he.*)

MRS. DON. I suppose it is just that a son is so much more to a mother than to a father.

MR. DON. I dare say.

MRS. DON (*a little gust of passion shaking her*). How you can read about the war nowadays!

MR. DON (*firmly to her—he has had to say it a good many times to himself*). I'm not going to give in. (*Apologetically*) I am so sorry I was in the way, Grace. I wasn't scouting you, or anything of that sort. It is just that I can't believe in it.

MRS. DON. Ah, Robert, you would believe if Dick had been to you what he was to me.

MR. DON. I don't know.

MRS. DON. In a sense you may be glad that you don't miss him in the way I do.

MR. DON. Yes, perhaps.

MRS. DON. Good-night, Robert.

MR. DON. Good-night, dear.

(He is alone now. He stands fingering the fishing-rods, then wanders back into the ingle-nook. In the room we could scarcely see him, for it has gone slowly dark there, a grey darkness, as if the lamp, though still burning, was becoming unable to shed light. Through the greyness we see him very well beyond it in the glow of the fire. He sits on the settle and tries to read his paper. He fails. He is a very lonely man.

In the silence something happens. A well-remembered voice says, 'Father.' MR. DON *looks into the greyness from which this voice comes, and he sees his son. We see no one, but we are to understand that, to* MR. DON, DICK *is standing there in his habit as he lived. He goes to his boy.)*

MR. DON. Dick!

DICK. I have come to sit with you for a bit, father.

(It is the gay, young, careless voice.)

MR. DON. It's you, Dick; it's you!

DICK. It's me all right, father. I say, don't be startled, or anything of that kind. We don't like that.

MR. DON. My boy!

(Evidently DICK *is the taller, for* MR. DON *has to look up to him. He puts his hands on the boy's shoulders.)*

DICK. How am I looking, father?

MR. DON. You haven't altered, Dick.

DICK. Rather not. It's jolly to see the old studio again! (*In a cajoling voice*) I say, father, don't fuss. Let us be our ordinary selves, won't you?

MR. DON. I'll try, I'll try. You didn't say you had come to sit with *me,* Dick? Not with *me!*

DICK. Rather!

MR. DON. But your mother—

DICK. It's you I want.

MR. DON. Me?

DICK. We can only come to one, you see.

MR. DON. Then why me?

DICK. That's the reason. (*He is evidently moving about, looking curiously at old acquaintances.*) Hullo, here's your old jacket, greasier than ever!

MR. DON. Me? But, Dick, it is as if you had forgotten. It was your mother who was everything to you. It can't be you if you have forgotten that. I used to feel so out of it; but, of course, you didn't know.

DICK. I didn't know it till now, father; but heaps of things that I didn't know once are clear to me now. I didn't know that you were the one who would miss me most; but I know now.

(*Though the voice is as boyish as ever, there is a new note in it of which his father is aware.* DICK *may not have grown much wiser, but whatever*

he does know now he seems to know for certain.)

MR. DON. *Me* miss you most? Dick, I try to paint just as before. I go to the club. Dick, I have been to a dinner-party. I said I wouldn't give in.

DICK. We like that.

MR. DON. But, my boy—

(MR. DON's *arms have gone out to him again.* DICK *evidently wriggles away from them. He speaks coaxingly.*)

DICK. I say, father, let's get away from that sort of thing.

MR. DON. That is so like you, Dick! I'll do anything you ask.

DICK. Then keep a bright face.

MR. DON. I've tried to.

DICK. Good man! I say, put on your old greasy; you are looking so beastly clean.

(*The old greasy is the jacket, and* MR. DON *obediently gets into it.*)

MR. DON. Anything you like. No, that's the wrong sleeve. Thanks, Dick.

(*They are in the ingle-nook now, and the mischievous boy catches his father by the shoulders.*)

DICK. Here, let me shove you into your old seat.

(MR. DON *is propelled on to the settle.*)

How's that, umpire!

MR. DON (*smiling*). Dick, that's just how you used to butt me into it long ago!

(DICK *is probably standing with his back to the fire, chuckling.*)

DICK. When I was a kid.

MR. DON. With the palette in my hand.

DICK. Or sticking to your trousers.

MR. DON. The mess we made of ourselves, Dick!

DICK. I sneaked behind the settle and climbed up it.

MR. DON. Till you fell off.

DICK. On top of you and the palette.

(*It is good fun for a father and son; and the crafty boy has succeeded in making the father laugh.*)

MR. DON (*sadly*). Ah, Dick.

(*The son frowns. He is not going to stand any nonsense.*)

DICK. Now then, behave! What did I say about that face?

(MR. DON *smiles at once, obediently.*)

That's better. I'll sit here.

(*We see from his father's face, which is smiling with difficulty, that* DICK *has plopped into the big chair on the other side of the ingle-nook. His legs are probably dangling over one of its arms.*)

DICK (*rather sharply*). Got your pipe?

MR. DON. I don't—I don't seem to care to smoke nowadays, Dick.

DICK. Rot! Just because I am dead. You that pretend to be plucky! I won't have it, you know. You get your pipe, and look slippy about it.

MR. DON (*obediently*). Yes, Dick. (*He fills his pipe from a jar on the mantelshelf. We may be sure that* DICK *is watching closely to see that he lights it properly.*)

DICK. Now, then, burn your thumb with the match—you always did, you know. That's the style. You've forgotten to cock your head to the side. Not so bad. That's you. Like it?

MR. DON. It's rather nice, Dick. Dick, you and me by the fire!

DICK. Yes, but sit still. How often we might have been like this, father, and weren't.

MR. DON. Ah!

DICK. Face! How is Fido?

MR. DON. Never a dog missed her master more.

DICK (*frowning*). She doesn't want to go and sit on my grave, or any of that tosh, does she? As if I were there!

MR. DON (*hastily*). No, no; she goes ratting, Dick.

DICK. Good old Fido!

MR. DON. Dick, here's a good one. We oughtn't to keep a dog at all because we are on rations now; but what do you think Fido ate yesterday?

DICK. Let me guess. The joint?

MR. DON. Almost worse than that. She ate all the cook's meat tickets.

(*They laugh together.*)

DICK. That dog will be the death of me.

(*His father shivers but* DICK *does not notice this; his eyes have drawn him to the fishing-rods.*) Hullo!

MR. DON. Yes, those are your old fishing-rods.

DICK. Here's the little hickory! Do you remember, father, how I got the seven-pounder on a burn-trout cast? No, you weren't there. That was a day. It was really only six and three-quarters. I put a stone in its mouth the second time we weighed it!

MR. DON. You loved fishing, Dick.

DICK. Didn't I? Why weren't you oftener with me? I'll tell you a funny thing. When I went a-soldiering I used to pray—just standing up, you know—that I shouldn't lose my right arm, because it would be so awkward for casting. (*He cogitates as he returns to the ingle-nook.*) Somehow I never thought I should be killed. Lots of fellows thought that about themselves, but I never did. It was quite a surprise to me.

MR. DON. Oh, Dick!

DICK. What's the matter? Oh, I forgot. Face! (*He is apparently looking down at his father wonderingly.*) Haven't you got over it yet, father? I

got over it so long ago. I wish you people would understand what a little thing it is.

MR. DON. Tell me, Dick.

DICK. All right. (*He is in the chair again.*) Mind, I can't tell you where I was killed; it's against the regulations.

MR. DON. I know where.

DICK (*curiously*). You got a wire, I suppose?

MR. DON. Yes.

DICK. There's always a wire for officers, even for 2nd Lieutenants. It's jolly decent of them.

MR. DON. Tell me, Dick, about the—the veil. I mean the veil that is drawn between the living and the—

DICK. The dead? Funny how you jib at that word.

MR. DON. I suppose the veil is like a mist?

DICK. The veil's a rummy thing, father. Yes, like a mist. But when one has been at the Front for a bit, you can't think how thin the veil seems to get; just one layer of it. I suppose it seems thin to you out there because one step takes you through it. We sometimes mix up those who have gone through with those who haven't. I dare say if I were to go back to my old battalion the living chaps would just nod to me.

MR. DON. My boy!

DICK. Where's that pipe? Death? Well, to me,

before my day came, it was like some part of the line I had heard a lot about but never been in. I mean, never been in to stay, because, of course, one often popped in and out.

MR. DON. Dick, the day that you—

DICK. My day? I don't remember being hit, you know. I don't remember anything till the quietness came. When you have been killed it suddenly becomes very quiet; quieter even than you have ever known it at home. Sunday used to be a pretty quiet day at my tutor's, when Trotter and I flattened out on the first shady spot up the river; but it is quieter than that. I am not boring you, am I?

MR. DON. Oh, Dick!

DICK. When I came to, the veil was so thin that I couldn't see it at all; and my first thought was, Which side of it have I come out on? The living ones lying on the ground were asking that about themselves, too. There we were, all sitting up and asking whether we were alive or dead; and some were one, and some were the other. Sort of fluke, you know.

MR. DON. I—I—

DICK. As soon as each had found out about himself he wondered how it had gone with his chums. I halloo'd to Johnny Randall, and he halloo'd back that he was dead, but that Trotter was living. That's the way of it. A good deal of chaff, of course. By that time the veil was there, and getting thicker, and we

lined up on our right sides. Then I could only see the living ones in shadow and hear their voices from a distance. They sang out to us for a while; but just at first, father, it was rather lonely when we couldn't hear their tread any longer. What are you fidgeting about? You needn't worry; that didn't last long; we were heaps more interested in ourselves than in them. You should have heard the gabbling! It was all so frightfully novel, you see; and no one quite knew what to do next, whether all to start off together, or wait for some one to come for us. I say, what a lot I'm talking!

MR. DON. What happened, Dick?

DICK (*a proud ring coming into the voice*). Ockley came for us. He used to be alive, you know—the Ockley who was keeper of the fives in my first half. I once pointed him out to mother. I was jolly glad he was the one who came for us. As soon as I saw it was Ockley I knew we should be all right.

MR. DON. I like that Ockley.

DICK. Rather. I wish I could remember something funny to tell you, though. There are lots of jokes, but I am such a one for forgetting them.

(*He laughs boisterously. We may be sure that he flings back his head. You remember how* DICK *used to fling back his head when he laughed?—No, you didn't know him.*)

Father, do you remember little Wantage who was at

my private and came on to Ridley's house in my third half? His mother was the one you called Emily.

MR. DON. Emily Wantage's boy?

DICK. That's the card. We used to call him Jemima, because he and his mother were both caught crying when lock-up struck, and she had to clear out.

MR. DON. She was very fond of him.

DICK. Oh, I expect no end. Tell her he's killed.

MR. DON. She knows.

DICK. She had got a wire. That isn't the joke, though. You see he got into a hopeless muddle about which side of the veil he had come out on; and he went off with the other ones, and they wouldn't have him, and he got lost in the veil, running up and down it, calling to us; and just for the lark we didn't answer. (*He chuckles*) I expect he has become a ghost! (*With sudden consideration*) Best not tell his mother that.

(MR. DON *rises, wincing, and* DICK *also is at once on his feet, full of compunction.*)

Was that shabby of me? Sorry, father. We are all pretty young, you know, and we can't help having our fun still.

MR. DON. I'm glad you still have your fun. Let me look at you again, Dick. There is such a serenity about you now.

DICK. Serenity—that's the word! None of us could remember what the word was. It's a ripping

good thing to have. I should be awfully bucked if you would have it, too.

MR. DON. I'll try.

DICK. I say, how my tongue runs on! But, after all, it was my show. Now, you tell me some things.

MR. DON. What about, Dick? The war?

DICK (*almost in a shout*). No. We have a fine for speaking about the war. And you know, those fellows we were fighting—I forget who they were?

MR. DON. The Germans.

DICK. Oh yes. Some of them were on the same side of the veil with us, and they were rather decent; so we chummed up in the end and Ockley took us all away together. They were jolly lucky in getting Ockley. There I go again! Come on, it's your turn. Has the bathroom tap been mended yet?

MR. DON. I'm afraid it is—just tied up with that string still, Dick. It works all right.

DICK. It only needs two screw-nails, you know.

MR. DON. I'll see to it.

DICK. Do you know whether any one at my tutor's got his fives choice this half?

MR. DON. I'm sorry, but—

DICK. Or who is the captain of the boats?

MR. DON. No, I—

DICK. Whatever have you been doing? (*He is moving about the room.*) Hullo, here's mother's workbox. Is mother all right?

MR. DON. Very sad about you, Dick.

DICK. Oh, I say, that isn't fair. Why doesn't she cheer up?

MR. DON. It isn't so easy, my boy.

DICK. It's pretty hard lines on me, you know.

MR. DON. How is that?

DICK. If you are sad, I have to be sad. That's how we have got to work it off. You can't think how we want to be bright.

MR. DON. I'll always remember that, and I'll tell your mother. Ah, but she won't believe me, Dick; you will have to tell her yourself.

DICK. I can't do that, father. I can only come to one.

MR. DON. She should have been the one; she loved you best, Dick.

DICK. Oh, I don't know. Do you ever (*with a slight hesitation*) see Laura now?

MR. DON. She is staying with us at present.

DICK. Is she? I think I should like to see her.

MR. DON. If Laura were to see you—

DICK. Oh, she wouldn't see me. She is not dressed in black, is she?

MR. DON. No, in white.

DICK. Good girl! I suppose mother is in black?

MR. DON. Of course, Dick.

DICK. It's too bad, you know.

MR. DON. You weren't exactly—engaged to Laura,

were you, Dick? (*Apologetically*) I never rightly knew.

DICK (*confidentially*). Father, I sometimes thought of it, but it rather scared me. I expect that is about how it was with her, too.

MR. DON. She is very broken about you now.

DICK (*irritated*). Oh, hang!

MR. DON. Would you like her to forget you, Dick?

DICK. Rather not. But she might help a fellow a bit. Hullo!

(*What calls forth this exclamation is the little table at which the séance had taken place. The four chairs are still standing round it, as if they were guarding something.*)

DICK. Here's something new, father; this table.

MR. DON. Yes, it is usually in the drawing-room.

DICK. Of course. I remember.

MR. DON (*setting his teeth*). Does that table suggest anything to you, Dick?

DICK. To me? Let me think. Yes, I used to play backgammon on it. What is it doing here?

MR. DON. Your mother brought it in.

DICK. To play games on? Mother!

MR. DON. I don't—know that it was a game, Dick.

DICK. But to play anything! I'm precious glad she can do that. Was Laura playing with her?

MR. DON. She was helping her.

DICK. Good for Laura. (*He is looking at some*

slips of paper on the table.) Are those pieces of paper used in the game? There is writing on them: 'The first letter is H—the second letter is A—the third letter is R.' What does it mean?

MR. DON. Does it convey no meaning to you, Dick?

DICK. To me? No; why should it?

(MR. DON *is enjoying no triumph.*)

MR. DON. Let us go back to the fire, my boy.

(DICK *follows him into the ingle-nook.*)

DICK. But why should it convey a meaning to me? I was never much of a hand at indoor games. (*Brightly*) I bet you Ockley would be good at it. (*After a joyous rumble*) Ockley's nickname still sticks to him!

MR. DON. I don't think I know it.

DICK. He was a frightful swell, you know. Keeper of the field, and played at Lord's the same year. I suppose it did go just a little to his head.

(*They are back in their old seats, and* MR. DON *leans forward in gleeful anticipation. Probably* DICK *is leaning forward in the same way, and this old father is merely copying him.*)

MR. DON. What did you nickname him, Dick?

DICK. It was his fags that did it!

MR. DON. I should like to know it. I say, do tell me, Dick.

DICK. He is pretty touchy about it now, you know.

MR. DON. I won't tell any one. Come on, Dick.

DICK. His fags called him K.C.M.G.

MR. DON. Meaning, Dick?

DICK. Meaning 'Kindly Call Me God!'

(MR. DON *flings back his head; so we know what* DICK *is doing. They are a hilarious pair, perhaps too noisy, for suddenly* MR. DON *looks at the door.*)

MR. DON. I think I heard some one, Dick!

DICK. Perhaps it's mother!

MR. DON (*nervously*). She may have heard the row.

(DICK'S *eyes must be twinkling.*)

DICK. I say, father, you'll catch it!

MR. DON. I can't believe, Dick, that she won't see you.

DICK. Only one may see me.

MR. DON. You will speak to her, Dick. Let her hear your voice.

DICK. Only one may hear me. I could make her the one; but it would mean your losing me.

MR. DON. I can't give you up, Dick.

(MRS. DON *comes in, as beautiful as ever, but a little aggrieved.*)

MRS. DON. I called to you, Robert.

MR. DON. Yes, I thought—I was just going to—

(*He has come from the ingle-nook to meet her. He looks from her to* DICK, *whom he sees so clearly, standing now by the fire. An awe falls*

upon MR. DON. *He says her name, meaning, 'See, Grace, who is with us.'*

Her eyes follow his, but she sees nothing, not even two arms outstretched to her.)

MRS. DON. What is it, Robert? What is the matter?

(*She does not hear a voice say 'Mother.'*) I heard you laughing, Robert; what on earth at?

(*The father cannot speak.*)

DICK (*in a mischievous voice*). Now you're in a hole, father!

MRS. DON. Can I not be told, Robert?

DICK. Something in the paper.

(MR. DON *lifts the paper feebly, and his wife understands.*)

MRS. DON. Oh, a newspaper joke! Please, I don't want to hear it.

MR. DON. Was it my laughing that brought you back, Grace?

MRS. DON. No, that would only have made me shut my door. If Dick thought you could laugh! (*She goes to the little table.*) I came back for these slips of paper. (*She lifts them and presses them to her breast.*) These precious slips of paper!

DICK (*forgetting that she cannot hear him*). How do you mean, mother? Why are they precious?

(MR. DON *forgets also and looks to her for an answer.*)

MRS. DON. What is it, Robert?

MR. DON. Didn't you hear—anything, Grace?

MRS. DON. No. Perhaps Laura was calling; I left her on the stair.

MR. DON. I wish Laura would come back and say good-night to me.

MRS. DON. I dare say she will.

MR. DON. And, if she could be—rather brighter, Grace.

MRS. DON. Robert!

MR. DON. I think Dick would like it.

(*Her fine eyes reproach him mutely.*)

MRS. DON. Is that how you look at it, Robert? Very well, laugh your fill—if you can. But if Dick were to appear before me to-night—

(*In his distress* MR. DON *cries aloud to the figure by the fire.*)

MR. DON. Dick, if you can appear to your mother, do it.

(*There is a pause in which anything may happen, but nothing happens. Yes, something has happened: Dick has stuck to his father.*)

MRS. DON. Really, Robert!

(*Without a word of reproach, she goes away. Evidently* DICK *comes to his father, who has sunk into a chair, and puts a loving hand on him.* MR. DON *clasps it without looking up.*)

DICK. Father, that was top-hole of you! Poor

mother, I should have liked to hug her; but I can't.

MR. DON. You should have gone to her, Dick; you shouldn't have minded me.

DICK. Mother's a darling, but she doesn't need me as much as you do.

MR. DON. I don't know.

DICK. I do. I'm glad she's so keen about that game, though.

(*He has returned to the ingle-nook when* LAURA *comes in, eager to make amends to* DICK's *father if she hurt him when she went out.*)

LAURA (*softly*). I have come to say good-night, Mr. Don.

MR. DON (*taking both her hands*). It's nice of you, Laura.

DICK. I want her to come nearer to the fire; I can't see her very well there.

(*For a moment* MR. DON *is caught out again; but* LAURA *has heard nothing.*)

MR. DON. Your hands are cold, Laura; go over to the fire. I want to look at you.

(*She sits on the hearthstone by* DICK's *feet.*)

LAURA (*shyly*). Am I all right?

DICK. You're awfully pretty, Laura. You are even prettier than I thought. I remember I used to think, she can't be quite as pretty as I think her; and then when you came you were just a little prettier.

LAURA (*who has been warming her hands*). Why don't you say anything?

MR. DON. I was thinking of you and Dick, Laura. If Dick had lived, do you think that you and he—?

LAURA (*with shining eyes*). I think—if he had wanted it very much.

MR. DON. I expect he would, my dear.

(*There is an odd candour about* DICK's *contribution.*)

DICK. I think so, too, but I never was quite sure.

LAURA (*who is trembling a little*). Mr. Don—

MR. DON. Yes, Laura?

LAURA. I think there is something wicked about me. I sometimes feel—quite light-hearted—though Dick has gone.

MR. DON. Perhaps, nowadays, the fruit trees have that sort of shame when they blossom, Laura; but they can't help doing it. I hope you are yet to be a happy woman, a happy wife.

LAURA. It seems so heartless to Dick.

DICK. Not a bit; it's what I should like.

MR. DON. It's what he would like, Laura.

DICK. Do you remember, Laura, I kissed you once. It was under a lilac in the Loudon Woods. I am afraid you were angry.

(*His sweetheart has risen, tasting something bitter-sweet.*)

MR. DON. What is it, Laura?

LAURA. Somehow—I don't know how—but, for a moment I seemed to smell lilac. Dick was once—nice to me under a lilac. Oh, Mr. Don—

(*She goes to him like a child, and he soothes and pets her. He takes her to the door.*)

MR. DON. Good-night, my dear.

LAURA. Good-night, Mr. Don.

DICK. Good-bye, Laura.

(MR. DON *is looking so glum that the moment they are alone* DICK *has to cry warningly, 'Face!'*)

Pretty awful things, these partings. Father, don't feel hurt though I dodge the good-bye business when I leave you.

MR. DON. That's so like you, Dick!

DICK. I'll have to go soon.

MR. DON. Oh, Dick! Can't you—

DICK. There's something I want not to miss, you see.

MR. DON. I'm glad of that.

DICK. I'm not going yet; but I mean that when I do I'll just slip away.

MR. DON. What I am afraid of is that you won't come back.

DICK. I will—honest Injun—if you keep bright.

MR. DON. But, if I do that, Dick, you might think I wasn't missing you so much.

DICK. We know better than that. You see, if you're bright, I'll get a good mark for it.

MR. DON. I'll be bright.

(DICK *pops him into the settle again.*)

DICK. Remember your pipe.

MR. DON. Yes, Dick.

DICK. Do you still go to that swimming-bath, and do your dumb-bell exercises?

MR. DON. No, I—

DICK. You must.

MR. DON. All right, Dick, I will.

DICK. And I want you to be smarter next time. Your hair's awful.

MR. DON. I'll get it cut.

DICK. Are you hard at work over your picture of those three Graces?

MR. DON. No, I put that away. I'm just doing little things nowadays. I can't—

DICK. Look here, sonny, you've got to go on with it. You don't seem to know how interested I am in your future.

MR. DON. Very well, Dick; I'll bring it out again.

(*He hesitates.*)

Dick, there is something I have wanted to ask you all the time.

(*Some fear seems to come into the boy's voice.*)

DICK. Don't ask it, father.

MR. DON. I shall go on worrying about it if I don't —but just as you like, Dick.

DICK. Go ahead; ask me.

MR. DON. It is this. Would you rather be—here —than there?

DICK. Not always.

MR. DON. What is the great difference, Dick?

DICK. Well, down here one knows he has risks to run.

MR. DON. And you miss that?

DICK. It must be rather jolly.

MR. DON. Did you know that was what I was to ask?

DICK. Yes. But, remember, I'm young at it.

MR. DON. And your gaiety, Dick; is it all real, or only put on to help me?

DICK. It's—it's half and half, father. Face!

MR. DON. When will you come again, Dick?

DICK. There's no saying. One can't always get through. They keep changing the password. (*His voice grows troubled.*) It's awfully difficult to get the password.

MR. DON. What was it to-night?

DICK. Love Bade Me Welcome.

(MR. DON *rises; he stares at his son.*)

MR. DON. How did you get it, Dick?

DICK. I'm not sure. (*He seems to go closer to his*

father, as if for protection.) There are lots of things I don't understand yet.

DON. There are things I don't understand either. Dick, did you ever try to send messages—from there —to us?

DICK. Me? No.

MR. DON. Or get messages from us?

DICK. No. How could we?

MR. DON. Is there anything in it?

(*He is not speaking to his son. He goes to the little table and looks long at it. Has it taken on a sinister aspect? Those chairs, are they guarding a secret?*)

Dick, this table—your mother—how could they—

(*He turns to find that* DICK *has gone.*)

Dick! My boy! Dick!

(*The well-remembered voice leaves a message behind it.*)

DICK. Face!

THE NEW WORD

THE NEW WORD

ANY room nowadays must be the scene, for any father and any son are the *dramatis personæ*. We could pick them up in Mayfair, in Tooting, on the Veldt, in rectories or in grocers' back parlours, dump them down on our toy stage and tell them to begin. It is a great gathering to choose from, but our needs are small. Let the company shake hands, and all go away but two. In other words, it is war-time.

The two who have remained (it is discovered on inquiry) are Mr. Torrance and his boy; so let us make use of them. Torrance did not linger in order to be chosen, he was anxious, like all of them, to be off; but we recognised him, and sternly signed to him to stay. Not that we knew him personally, but the fact is, we remembered him (we never forget a face) as the legal person who reads out the names of the jury before the court opens, and who brushes aside your reasons for wanting to be let off. It pleases our humour to tell Mr. Torrance that we cannot let him off.

He does not look so formidable as when last we saw him, and this is perhaps owing to our no longer being hunched with others on those unfeel-

ing benches. It is not because he is without a wig, for we saw him, on the occasion to which we are so guardedly referring, both in a wig and out of it; he passed behind a screen without it, and immediately (as quickly as we write) popped out in it, giving it a finishing touch rather like the butler's wriggle to his coat as he goes to the door. There are the two kinds of learned brothers, those who use the screen, and those who (so far as the jury knows) sleep in their wigs. The latter are the swells, and include the judges; whom, however, we who write have seen in public thoroughfares without their wigs, a horrible sight that has doubtless led many an onlooker to crime.

Mr. Torrance, then, is no great luminary; indeed, when we accompany him to his house, as we must, in order to set our scene properly, we find that it is quite a suburban affair, only one servant kept, and her niece engaged twice a week to crawl about the floors. There is no fire in the drawing-room, so the family remain on after dinner in the dining-room, which rather gives them away. There is really no one in the room but Roger. That is the truth of it, though to the unseeing eye all the family are there except Roger. They consist of Mr., Mrs., and Miss Torrance. Mr. Torrance is enjoying his evening paper and a cigar, and every line of him is insisting stubbornly that nothing unusual is happening in the

house. In the home circle (and now that we think of it, even in court) he has the reputation of being a somewhat sarcastic gentleman; he must be dogged, too, otherwise he would have ceased long ago to be sarcastic to his wife, on whom wit falls like pellets on sandbags; all the dents they make are dimples.

Mrs. Torrance is at present exquisitely employed; she is listening to Roger's step overhead. You know what a delightful step the boy has. And what is more remarkable is that Emma is listening to it too, Emma who is seventeen, and who has been trying to keep Roger in his place ever since he first compelled her to bowl to him. Things have come to a pass when a sister so openly admits that she is only number two in the house.

Remarks well worthy of being recorded fall from these two ladies as they gaze upward. 'I think—didn't I, Emma?' is the mother's contribution, while it is Emma who replies in a whisper, 'No, not yet!'

Mr. Torrance calmly reads, or seems to read, for it is not possible that there can be anything in the paper as good as this. Indeed he occasionally casts a humorous glance at his womenfolk. Perhaps he is trying to steady them. Let us hope he has some such good reason for breaking in from time to time on their entrancing occupation.

MR. TORRANCE. Listen to this, dear. It is very im-

portant. The paper says, upon apparently good authority, that love laughs at locksmiths.

(*His wife answers without lowering her eyes.*)

MRS. TORRANCE. Did you speak, John? I am listening.

MR. TORRANCE. Yes, I was telling you that the Hidden Hand has at last been discovered in a tub in Russell Square.

MRS. TORRANCE. I hear, John. How thoughtful!

MR. TORRANCE. And so they must have been made of margarine, my love.

MRS. TORRANCE. I shouldn't wonder, John.

MR. TORRANCE. Hence the name Petrograd.

MRS. TORRANCE. Oh, was that the reason?

MR. TORRANCE. You will be pleased to hear, Ellen, that the honourable gentleman then resumed his seat.

MRS. TORRANCE. That was nice of him.

MR. TORRANCE. As I (*good-naturedly*) now resume mine, having made my usual impression.

MRS. TORRANCE. Yes, John.

(EMMA *slips upstairs to peep through a keyhole, and it strikes her mother that* JOHN *has been saying something. They are on too good terms to make an apology necessary.*)

MRS. TORRANCE (*blandly*). John, I haven't heard a word you said.

MR. TORRANCE. I'm sure you haven't, woman.

MRS. TORRANCE. I can't help being like this, John.

MR. TORRANCE. Go on being like yourself, dear.

MRS. TORRANCE. Am I foolish?

MR. TORRANCE. Um.

MRS. TORRANCE. Oh, but, John, how can you be so calm—with him up there?

MR. TORRANCE. He has been up there a good deal, you know, since we presented him to an astounded world nineteen years ago.

MRS. TORRANCE. But he—he is not going to be up there much longer, John. (*She sits on the arm of his chair, so openly to wheedle him that it is not worth his while to smile. Her voice is tremulous; she is a woman who can conceal nothing.*) You will be nice to him—to-night—won't you, John?

MR. TORRANCE (*a little pained*). Do I just begin to-night, Ellen?

MRS. TORRANCE. Oh no, no; but I think he is rather—shy of you at times.

MR. TORRANCE (*wryly*). That is because he is my son, Ellen.

MRS. TORRANCE. Yes—it's strange; but—yes.

MR. TORRANCE (*with a twinkle that is not all humorous*). Did it ever strike you, Ellen, that I am a bit—shy of him?

(*She is indeed surprised.*)

MRS. TORRANCE. Of Rogie!

MR. TORRANCE. I suppose it is because I am his father.

(*She presumes that this is his sarcasm again, and lets it pass at that. It reminds her of what she wants to say.*)

MRS. TORRANCE. You are so sarcastic (*she has never quite got the meaning of this word*) to Rogie at times. Boys don't like that, John.

MR. TORRANCE. Is that so, Ellen?

MRS. TORRANCE. Of course I don't mind your being sarcastic to *me*—

MR. TORRANCE. Much good (*groaning*) my being sarcastic to you! You are so seldom aware of it.

MRS. TORRANCE. I am not asking you to be a mother to him, John.

MR. TORRANCE. Thank you, my dear.

(*She does not know that he is sarcastic again.*)

MRS. TORRANCE. I quite understand that a man can't think all the time about his son as a mother does.

MR. TORRANCE. Can't he, Ellen? What makes you so sure of that?

MRS. TORRANCE. I mean that a boy naturally goes to his mother with his troubles rather than to his father. Rogie tells me everything.

MR. TORRANCE (*venturing*). I dare say he might tell me things he wouldn't tell you.

(*She smiles at this. It is very probably sarcasm.*)

MRS. TORRANCE. I want you to be serious just now. Why not show more warmth to him, John?

MR. TORRANCE (*with an unspoken sigh*). It would terrify him, Ellen. Two men show warmth to each other? Shame, woman!

MRS. TORRANCE. Two men! (*indignantly*). John, he is only nineteen.

MR. TORRANCE (*patting her hand*). That's all. Ellen, it is the great age to be to-day, nineteen.

(EMMA *darts in.*)

EMMA. Mother, he has unlocked the door! He is taking a last look at himself in the mirror before coming down!

(*Having made the great announcement, she is off again.*)

MRS. TORRANCE. You won't be sarcastic, John?

MR. TORRANCE. I give you my word—if you promise not to break down.

MRS. TORRANCE (*rashly*). I promise. (*She hurries to the door and back again.*) John, I'll contrive to leave you and him alone together for a little.

(MR. TORRANCE *is as alarmed as if the judge had looked over the bench and asked him to step up.*)

MR. TORRANCE. For God's sake, woman, don't do that. Father and son! He'll bolt; or if he doesn't, I will.

(EMMA TORRANCE *throws open the door grandly, and we learn what all the to-do is about.*)

EMMA. Allow me to introduce 2nd Lieutenant Torrance of the Royal Sussex. Father—your son; 2nd Lieutenant Torrance—your father. Mother—your little Rogie.

(ROGER, *in uniform, walks in, strung up for the occasion. Or the uniform comes forward with* ROGER *inside it. He has been a very ordinary nice boy up to now, dull at his 'books'; by an effort* MR. TORRANCE *had sent him to an obscure boarding-school, but at sixteen it was evident that an office was the proper place for* ROGER. *Before the war broke out he was treasurer of the local lawn tennis club, and his golf handicap was seven; he carried his little bag daily to and from the city, and his highest relaxation was giggling with girls or about them. Socially he had fallen from the standards of the home; even now that he is in his uniform the hasty might say something clever about 'temporary gentleman.' But there are great ideas buzzing in* ROGER'S *head, which would never have been there save for the war. At present he is chiefly conscious of his clothes. His mother embraces him with cries of rapture, while* MR. TORRANCE *surveys him quizzically over the paper; and* EMMA, *rushing to the piano, which is of such an*

old-fashioned kind that it can also be used as a sideboard, plays 'See the Conquering Hero Comes.')

ROGER (*in an agony*). Mater, do stop that chit making an ass of me.

(*He must be excused for his 'mater.' That was the sort of school; and his mother is rather proud of the phrase, though it sometimes makes his father wince.*)

MRS. TORRANCE. Emma, please, don't. But I'm sure you deserve the words, my darling. Doesn't he, John?

MR. TORRANCE (*missing his chance*). Hardly yet, you know. Can't be exactly a conquering hero the first night you put them on, can you, Roger?

ROGER (*hotly*). Did I say I was?

MRS. TORRANCE. Oh, John! Do turn round, Rogie. I never did—I never did!

EMMA. Isn't he a pet!

ROGER. Shut up, Emma.

MRS. TORRANCE (*challenging the world*). Though I say it who shouldn't—and yet, why shouldn't I?

MR. TORRANCE. In any case you will—so go ahead, 'mater.'

MRS. TORRANCE. I knew he would look splendid; but I—of course I couldn't know that he would look quite so splendid as this.

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ROGER. I know I look a bally ass. That is why I was such a time in coming down.

MR. TORRANCE. We thought we heard you upstairs strutting about.

MRS. TORRANCE. John! Don't mind him, Rogie.

ROGER (*haughtily*). I don't.

MR. TORRANCE. Oh!

ROGER. But I wasn't strutting.

MRS. TORRANCE. That dreadful sword! No, I would prefer you not to draw it, dear—not till necessity makes you.

MR. TORRANCE. Come, come, Ellen; that's rather hard lines on the boy. If he isn't to draw it here, where is he to draw it?

EMMA (*with pride*). At the Front, father.

MR. TORRANCE. I thought they left them at home nowadays, Roger?

ROGER. Yes, mater; you see, they are a bit in the way.

MRS. TORRANCE (*foolishly*). Not when you have got used to them.

MR. TORRANCE. That isn't what Roger means.

(*His son glares.*)

EMMA (*who, though she has not formerly thought much of* ROGER, *is now proud to trot by his side and will henceforth count the salutes*). I know what he means. If you carry a sword the snipers know you are an officer, and they try to pick you off.

MRS. TORRANCE. It's no wonder they are called Huns. Fancy a British sniper doing that! Roger, you will be very careful, won't you, in the trenches?

ROGER. Honour bright, mater.

MRS. TORRANCE. Above all, don't look up.

MR. TORRANCE. The trenches ought to be so deep that they can't look up.

MRS. TORRANCE. What a good idea, John!

ROGER. He's making game of you, mater.

MRS. TORRANCE (*unruffled*). Is he, my own?—very likely. Now about the question of provisions—

ROGER. Oh, lummy, you talk as if I was going off to-night! I mayn't go for months and months.

MRS. TORRANCE. I know—and, of course, there is a chance that you may not be needed at all.

ROGER (*poor boy*). None of that, mater.

MRS. TORRANCE. There is something I want to ask you, John—How long do you think the war is likely to last? (*Her* JOHN *resumes his paper.*) Rogie, I know you will laugh at me, but there are some things that I could not help getting for you.

ROGER. You know, you have knitted enough things already to fit up my whole platoon.

MRS. TORRANCE (*proud almost to tears*). His platoon!

EMMA. Have you noticed how fine all the words in -oon are? Platoon! Dragoon!

MR. TORRANCE. Spittoon.

EMMA. Colonel is good, but rather papaish; Major is nosey; Admiral of the Fleet is scrumptious, but Maréchal de France—that is the best of all.

MRS. TORRANCE. I think there is no word so nice as 2nd Lieutenant. (*Gulping*) Lot of little boys.

ROGER. Mater!

MRS. TORRANCE. I mean, just think of their cold feet. (*She produces many parcels and displays their strange contents.*) These are for putting inside your socks. Those are for outside your socks. I am told that it is also advisable to have straw in your boots.

MR. TORRANCE. Have you got him some straw?

MRS. TORRANCE. I thought, John, he could get it there. But if you think—

ROGER. He's making fun of you again, mater.

MRS. TORRANCE. I shouldn't wonder. Here are some overalls. One is leather and one fur, and this one is waterproof. The worst of it is that they are from different shops, and each says that the others keep the damp in, or draw the feet. They have such odd names, too. There are new names for everything nowadays. Vests are called cuirasses. Are you laughing at me, Rogie?

MR. TORRANCE (*sharply*). If he is laughing, he ought to be ashamed of himself.

ROGER (*barking*). Who was laughing?

MRS. TORRANCE. John!

(EMMA *cuffs her father playfully.*)

MR. TORRANCE. All very well, Emma, but it's past your bedtime.

EMMA (*indignantly*). You can't expect me to sleep on a night like this.

MR. TORRANCE. You can try.

MRS. TORRANCE. 2nd Lieutenant! 2nd Lieutenant!

MR. TORRANCE (*alarmed*). Ellen, don't break down. You promised.

MRS. TORRANCE. I am not going to break down; but—but there is a photograph of Rogie when he was very small—

MR. TORRANCE. Go to bed!

MRS. TORRANCE. I happen—to have it in my pocket—

ROGER. Don't bring it out, mater.

MRS. TORRANCE. If I break down, John, it won't be owing to the picture itself so much as because of what is written on the back.

(*She produces it dolefully.*)

MR. TORRANCE. Then don't look at the back.

(*He takes it from her.*)

MRS. TORRANCE (*not very hopeful of herself*). But I know what is written on the back, 'Roger John Torrance, aged two years four months, and thirty-three pounds.'

MR. TORRANCE. Correct. (*She weeps softly.*) There, there, woman. (*He signs imploringly to* EMMA.)

EMMA (*kissing him*). I'm going to by-by. 'Night, mammy. 'Night, Rog. (*She is about to offer him her cheek, then salutes instead, and rushes off, with* ROGER *in pursuit.*)

MRS. TORRANCE. I shall leave you together, John.

MR. TORRANCE (*half liking it, but nervous*). Do you think it's wise? (*With a groan*) You know what I am.

MRS. TORRANCE. Do be nice to him, dear. (ROGER's *return finds her very artful indeed.*) I wonder where I put my glasses?

ROGER. I'll look for them.

MRS. TORRANCE. No, I remember now. They are upstairs in such a funny place that I must go myself. Do you remember, Rogie, that I hoped they would reject you on account of your eyes?

ROGER. I suppose you couldn't help it.

MRS. TORRANCE (*beaming on her husband*). Did you believe I really meant it, John?

MR. TORRANCE (*curious*). Did *you,* Roger?

ROGER. Of course. Didn't you, father?

MR. TORRANCE. No! I knew the old lady better. (*He takes her hand.*)

MRS. TORRANCE (*sweetly*). I shouldn't have liked it, Rogie dear. I'll tell you something. You know your brother Harry died when he was seven. To you, I suppose, it is as if he had never been. You were barely five.

ROGER. I don't remember him, mater.

MRS. TORRANCE. No—no. But I do, Rogie. He would be twenty-one now; but though you and Emma grew up I have always gone on seeing him as just seven. Always till the war broke out. And now I see him a man of twenty-one, dressed in khaki, fighting for his country, same as you. I wouldn't have had one of you stay at home, though I had had a dozen. That is, if it is the noble war they all say it is. I'm not clever, Rogie, I have to take it on trust. Surely they wouldn't deceive mothers. I'll get my glasses.

(*She goes away, leaving the father and son somewhat moved. It is* MR. TORRANCE *who speaks first, gruffly.*)

MR. TORRANCE. Like to change your mother, Roger?

ROGER (*gruffly*). What do *you* think?

(*Then silence falls. These two are very conscious of being together, without so much as the tick of a clock to help them. The father clings to his cigar, sticks his knife into it, studies the leaf, tries crossing his legs another way. The son examines the pictures on the walls as if he had never seen them before, and is all the time edging toward the door.* MR. TORRANCE *wets his lips; it must be now or never.*)

MR. TORRANCE. Not going, Roger?

ROGER (*counting the chairs*). Yes, I thought—

MR. TORRANCE. Won't you—sit down and—have a chat?

ROGER (*bowled over*). A what? You and me!

MR. TORRANCE. Why not? (*rather truculently*).

ROGER. Oh—oh, all right (*sitting uncomfortably*).

(*The cigar gets several more stabs.*)

MR. TORRANCE. I suppose you catch an early train to-morrow?

ROGER. The 5.20. I have flag-signalling at half-past six.

MR. TORRANCE. Phew! Hours before I shall be up.

ROGER. I suppose so.

MR. TORRANCE. Well, you needn't dwell on it, Roger.

ROGER (*indignantly*). I didn't. (*He starts up.*) Good-night, father.

MR. TORRANCE. Good-night. Damn. Come back. My fault. Didn't I say I wanted to have a chat with you?

ROGER. I thought we had had it.

MR. TORRANCE (*gloomily*). No such luck.

(*There is another pause. A frightened ember in the fire makes an appeal to some one to say something.* MR. TORRANCE *rises. It is now he*

who is casting eyes at the door. He sits again, ashamed of himself.)

MR. TORRANCE (*pleasantly*). I like your uniform, Roger.

ROGER (*wriggling*). Haven't you made fun of me enough?

MR. TORRANCE (*sharply*). I'm not making fun of you. Don't you see I'm trying to tell you that I'm proud of you?

(ROGER *is at last aware of it, with dread.*)

ROGER. Good lord, father, *you* are not going to begin now.

(*The father restrains himself.*)

MR. TORRANCE. Do you remember, Roger, my saying that I didn't want you to smoke till you were twenty?

ROGER. Oh, it's that, is it? (*Shutting his mouth tight*) I never promised.

MR. TORRANCE (*almost with a shout*). It's not that. (*Kindly*) Have a cigar, my boy?

ROGER. Me?

(*A rather shaky hand passes him a cigar-case.* ROGER *selects from it and lights up nervously. He is now prepared for the worst.*)

MR. TORRANCE. Have you ever wondered, Roger, what sort of a fellow I am?

ROGER (*guardedly*). Often.

(MR. TORRANCE *casts all sense of decency to the winds; such is one of the effects of war.*)

MR. TORRANCE. I have often wondered what sort of fellow you are, Roger. We have both been at it on the sly. I suppose that is what makes a father and son so uncomfortable in each other's presence.

(ROGER *is not yet prepared to meet him halfway, but he casts a fly.*)

ROGER. Do you feel the creeps when you are left alone with me?

MR. TORRANCE. Mortally. My first instinct is to slip away.

ROGER (*with deep feeling*). So is mine.

MR. TORRANCE. You don't say so! (*with such surprise that the father undoubtedly goes up a step in the son's estimation*). I always seem to know what you are thinking, Roger.

ROGER. Do you? Same here.

MR. TORRANCE. As a consequence it is better, it is right, it is only decent that you and I should be very chary of confidences with each other.

ROGER (*relieved*). I'm dashed glad you see it in that way.

MR. TORRANCE. Oh, quite. And yet, Roger, if you had to answer this question on oath, 'Whom do you think you are most like in this world?'—I don't mean superficially, but deep down in your vitals—what

would you say? Your mother, your uncle, one of your friends on the golf links?

ROGER. No.

MR. TORRANCE. Who?

ROGER (*darkly*). You.

MR. TORRANCE. Just how I feel.

(*There is such true sympathy in the manly avowal that* ROGER *cannot but be brought closer to his father.*)

ROGER. It's pretty ghastly, father.

MR. TORRANCE. It is. I don't know for which it is worse.

(*They consider each other without bitterness.*)

MR. TORRANCE. You are a bit of a wag at times, Roger.

ROGER. You soon shut me up.

MR. TORRANCE. I have heard that you sparkle more freely in my absence.

ROGER. They say the same about you.

MR. TORRANCE. And now that you mention it, I believe it is true; and yet, isn't it a bigger satisfaction to you to catch me relishing your jokes than any other person?

ROGER (*his eyes opening wide*). How did you know that?

MR. TORRANCE. Because I am so bucked if I see you relishing mine.

ROGER. *Are* you? (*His hold on the certain things in life is slipping.*) You don't show it.

MR. TORRANCE. That is because of our awkward relationship.

ROGER (*lapsing into gloom*). We have got to go through with it.

MR. TORRANCE (*kicking the coals*). There's no way out.

ROGER. No.

MR. TORRANCE. We have, as it were, signed a compact, Roger, never to let on that we care for each other. As gentlemen we must stick to it.

ROGER. Yes. What are you getting at, father?

MR. TORRANCE. There is a war on, Roger.

ROGER. That needn't make any difference.

MR. TORRANCE. Yes, it does. My boy, be ready; I hate to hit you without warning. I'm going to cast a grenade into the middle of you. It's this, I'm fond of you, my boy.

ROGER (*squirming*). Father, if any one were to hear you!

MR. TORRANCE. They won't. The door is shut, Amy is gone to bed, and all is quiet in our street. Won't you—won't you say something civil to me in return, Roger?

(ROGER *looks at him and away from him.*)

ROGER. I sometimes—bragged about you at school.

MR. TORRANCE (*absurdly pleased*). Did you? What sort of things, Roger?

ROGER. I—I forget.

MR. TORRANCE. Come on, Roger.

ROGER. Is this fair, father?

MR. TORRANCE. No, I suppose it isn't. (*He attacks the coals again.*) You and your mother have lots of confidences, haven't you?

ROGER. I tell her a good deal. Somehow——

MR. TORRANCE. Yes, somehow one can. (*With the artfulness that comes of years*) I'm glad you tell her everything.

ROGER (*looking down his cigar*). Not everything, father. There are things—about oneself——

MR. TORRANCE. Aren't there, Roger!

ROGER. Best not to tell her.

MR. TORRANCE. Yes—yes. If there are any of them you would care to tell me instead—just if you want to, mind—just if you are in a hole or anything?

ROGER (*stiffly*). No, thanks.

MR. TORRANCE. Any little debts, for instance?

ROGER. That's all right now. Mother——

MR. TORRANCE. She did?

ROGER (*ready to jump at him*). I was willing to speak to you about them, but—

MR. TORRANCE. She said, 'Not worth while bothering father.'

ROGER. How did you know?

MR. TORRANCE. Oh, I have met your mother before, you see. Nothing else?

ROGER. No.

MR. TORRANCE. Haven't been an ass about a girl or anything of that sort?

ROGER. Good lord, father!

MR. TORRANCE. I shouldn't have said it. In my young days we sometimes— It's all different now.

ROGER. I don't know. I could tell you things that would surprise you.

MR. TORRANCE. No! Not about yourself?

ROGER. No. At least—

MR. TORRANCE. Just as you like, Roger.

ROGER. It blew over long ago.

MR. TORRANCE. Then there's no need?

ROGER. No—oh no. It was just—you know—the old, old story.

(*He eyes his father suspiciously, but not a muscle in* MR. TORRANCE'S *countenance is out of place.*)

MR. TORRANCE. I see. It hasn't—left you bitter about the sex, Roger, I hope?

ROGER. Not now. She—you know what women are.

MR. TORRANCE. Yes, yes.

ROGER. You needn't mention it to mother.

MR. TORRANCE. I won't. (*He is elated to share a secret with* ROGER *about which mother is not to*

know.) Think your mother and I are an aged pair, Roger?

ROGER. I never—of course you are not young.

MR. TORRANCE. How long have you known that? I mean, it's true—but I didn't know it till quite lately.

ROGER. That you're old?

MR. TORRANCE. Hang it, Roger, not so bad as that—elderly. This will stagger you; but I assure you that until the other day I jogged along thinking of myself as on the whole still one of the juveniles. (*He makes a wry face.*) I crossed the bridge, Roger, without knowing it.

ROGER. What made you know?

MR. TORRANCE. What makes us know all the new things?—the war. I'll tell you a secret. When we realised in August of 1914 that myriads of us were to be needed, my first thought wasn't that I had a son, but that I must get fit myself.

ROGER. You!

MR. TORRANCE. Funny, isn't it? But, as I tell you, I didn't know I had ceased to be young. I went into Regent's Park and tried to run a mile.

ROGER. Lummy, you might have killed yourself.

MR. TORRANCE. I nearly did—especially as I had put a weight on my shoulders to represent my kit. I kept at it for a week, but I knew the game was up. The discovery was pretty grim.

ROGER. Don't you bother about that part of it.

You are doing your share, taking care of mother and Emma.

(MR. TORRANCE *emits a laugh of self-contempt.*)

MR. TORRANCE. I am not taking care of them. It is you who are taking care of them. My friend, you are the head of the house now.

ROGER. Father!

MR. TORRANCE. Yes, we have come back to hard facts, and the defender of the house is the head of it.

ROGER. Me? Fudge.

MR. TORRANCE. It's true. The thing that makes me wince most is that some of my contemporaries have managed to squeeze back: back into youth, Roger, though I guess they were a pretty tight fit in the turnstile. There is Coxon; he is in khaki now, with his hair dyed, and when he and I meet at the club we know that we belong to different generations. I'm a decent old fellow, but I don't really count any more, while Coxon, lucky dog, is being damned daily on parade.

ROGER. I hate your feeling it in that way, father.

MR. TORRANCE. I don't say it is a palatable draught, but when the war is over we shall all shake down to the new conditions. No fear of my being sarcastic to you then, Roger. I'll have to be jolly respectful.

ROGER. Shut up, father!

MR. TORRANCE. You've begun, you see. Don't

worry, Roger. Any rawness I might feel in having missed the chance of seeing whether I was a man—like Coxon, confound him!—is swallowed up in the pride of giving the chance to you. I'm in a shiver about you, but— It's all true, Roger, what your mother said about 2nd Lieutenants. Till the other day we were so little of a military nation that most of us didn't know there *were* 2nd Lieutenants. And now, in thousands of homes we feel that there is nothing else. 2nd Lieutenant! It is like a new word to us—one, I dare say, of many that the war will add to our language. We have taken to it, Roger. If a son of mine were to tarnish it—

ROGER (*growling*). I'll try not to.

MR. TORRANCE. If you did, I should just know that there had been something wrong about me.

ROGER (*gruffly*). You're all right.

MR. TORRANCE. If I am, you are. (*It is a winning face that* MR. TORRANCE *turns on his son*). I suppose you have been asking yourself of late, what if you were to turn out to be a funk!

ROGER. How did you know?

MR. TORRANCE. I know because you are me. Because ever since there was talk of this commission I have been thinking and thinking what were you thinking—so as to help you.

(*This itself is a help.* ROGER'S *hand—but he withdraws it hurriedly.*)

ROGER (*wistfully*). They all seem to be so frightfully brave, father.

MR. TORRANCE. I expect that the best of them had the same qualms as you before their first engagement.

ROGER. I—I kind of think, father, that I won't be a funk.

MR. TORRANCE. I kind of think so too, Roger. (MR. TORRANCE *forgets himself.*) Mind you don't be rash, my boy; and for God's sake, keep your head down in the trenches.

(ROGER *has caught him out. He points a gay finger at his anxious father.*)

ROGER. You know you laughed at mother for saying that!

MR. TORRANCE. Did I? Your mother thinks that I have an unfortunate manner with you.

ROGER (*magnanimously*). Oh, I don't know. It's just the father-and-son complication.

MR. TORRANCE. That is really all it is. But she thinks I should show my affection for you more openly.

ROGER (*wriggling again*). I wouldn't do that. Of course for this once—but in a general way I wouldn't do that. *We* know, you and I.

MR. TORRANCE. As long as we know, it's no one else's affair, is it?

ROGER. That's the ticket, father.

(*It is to be feared that* MR. TORRANCE *is now taking advantage of his superior slyness.*)

MR. TORRANCE. Still, before your mother—to please her—eh?

ROGER (*faltering*). I suppose it would.

MR. TORRANCE. Well, what do you say?

ROGER. I know she would like it.

MR. TORRANCE. Of course you and I know that such display is all bunkum—repellant even to our natures.

ROGER. Lord, yes!

MR. TORRANCE. But to gratify her?

ROGER. I should be so conscious.

MR. TORRANCE. So should I.

ROGER (*considering it*). How far would you go?

MR. TORRANCE. Oh, not far. Suppose I called you 'Old Rogie'? There's not much in that.

ROGER. It all depends on the way one says these things.

MR. TORRANCE. I should be quite casual.

ROGER. Hum. What would you like me to call you?

MR. TORRANCE (*severely*). It isn't what would *I* like. But I dare say your mother would beam if you called me 'dear father.'

ROGER. I don't think so.

MR. TORRANCE. You know quite well that you think so, Roger.

ROGER. It's so effeminate.

MR. TORRANCE. Not if you say it casually.

ROGER (*with something very like a snort*). How does one say a thing like that casually?

MR. TORRANCE. Well, for instance, you could whistle while you said it—or anything of that sort.

ROGER. Hum. Of course you—if we were to—be like that, you wouldn't *do* anything.

MR. TORRANCE. How do you mean?

ROGER. You wouldn't paw me?

MR. TORRANCE (*with some natural indignation*). Roger! you forget yourself. (*But apparently it is for him to continue.*) That reminds me of a story I heard the other day of a French general. He had asked for volunteers from his airmen for some specially dangerous job—and they all stepped forward. Pretty good that. Then three were chosen and got their orders and saluted, and were starting off when he stopped them. 'Since when,' he said, 'have brave boys departing to the post of danger omitted to embrace their father?' They did it then. Good story?

ROGER (*lowering*). They were French.

MR. TORRANCE. Yes, I said so. Don't you think it's good?

ROGER. Why do you tell it to me?

MR. TORRANCE. Because it's a good story.

ROGER (*sternly*). You are sure that there is no other reason? (MR. TORRANCE *tries to brazen it out,*

but he looks guilty.) You know, father, that is barred.

(*Just because he knows that he has been playing it low,* MR. TORRANCE *snaps angrily.*)

MR. TORRANCE. What is barred?

ROGER. You know.

MR. TORRANCE (*shouting*). I know that you are a young ass.

ROGER. Really, father—

MR. TORRANCE. Hold your tongue.

(ROGER *can shout also.*)

ROGER. I must say, father—

MR. TORRANCE. Be quiet, I tell you.

(*It is in the middle of this competition that the lady who dotes on them both chooses to come back, still without her spectacles.*)

MRS. TORRANCE. Oh dear! And I had hoped—Oh, John!

(MR. TORRANCE *would like to kick himself.*)

MR. TORRANCE. My fault.

MRS. TORRANCE. But whatever is the matter?

ROGER. Nothing, mater. (*The war is already making him quite clever*). Only father wouldn't do as I told him.

MR. TORRANCE. Why the dickens should I?

(ROGER *is imperturbable; this will be useful in France.*)

ROGER. You see, mater, he said I was the head of the house.

MRS. TORRANCE. You, Rogie! (*She goes to her husband's side.*) What nonsense!

ROGER (*grinning*). Do you like my joke, father?

(*The father smiles upon him and is at once uproariously happy. He digs his boy boldly in the ribs.*)

MR. TORRANCE. Roger, you scoundrel!

MRS. TORRANCE. That's better.

ROGER (*feeling that things have perhaps gone far enough*). I think I'll go to my room now. You will come up, mater?

MRS. TORRANCE. Yes, dear. I shan't be five minutes, John.

MR. TORRANCE. More like half an hour.

MRS. TORRANCE (*hesitating*). There is nothing wrong, is there? I thought I noticed a—a—

MR. TORRANCE. A certain liveliness, my dear. No, we were only having a good talk.

MRS. TORRANCE. What about, John?

ROGER (*hurriedly*). About the war.

MR. TORRANCE. About tactics and strategy, wasn't it, Roger?

ROGER. Yes.

MR. TORRANCE. The fact is, Ellen, I have been helping Roger to take his first trench. (*With a big breath*) And we took it too, together, didn't we, Roger?

ROGER (*valiantly*). You bet.

MR. TORRANCE (*sighing*). Though I suppose it is one of those trenches that the enemy retake during the night.

ROGER. Oh, I—I don't know, father.

MRS. TORRANCE. Whatever are you two talking about?

MR. TORRANCE (*in high feather, patting her, but unable to resist a slight boast*). It is very private. *We* don't tell you everything, you know, Ellen.

(*She beams, though she does not understand.*)

ROGER. Come on, mater, it's only his beastly sarcasm again. 'Night, father; I won't see you in the morning.

MR. TORRANCE. 'Night.

(*But* ROGER *has not gone yet. He seems to be looking for something—a book, perhaps. Then he begins to whistle—casually.*)

ROGER. Good-night, dear father.

(MR. JOHN TORRANCE *is left alone, rubbing his hands.*)

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